



THE INDEPENDENT

N° 3,174

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WEATHER: Dry and bright

(1R65P) 60p

THE EYE

14 days of TV



THE LONG WEEKEND

Walking
watching
praying
playing



THE MAGAZINE

Quiz
of the
Year



Yuletide fun: Curses, knives and relatives from hell

Marianne Macdonald
Media Correspondent

Forget the propaganda — just how much fun is the British Christmas, really? Not a lot, according to a fly-on-the-wall documentary scheduled to be shown on Christmas Eve, and bound to win a Scrooge-of-the-year award. It paints a picture of cat-fighting relatives, spoilt children and shopping from hell.

Channel 4's *The Real Christmas Show* shadowed celebrations of six families last year.

Meanwhile Debbie Duval is lucky to be having Christmas at all. A kidney and pancreas transplant left her bedridden the previous year and doctors had given her only a 50-50 chance of survival. She spends Christmas with her husband Jonathon and his brother Eddie in Cornwall. All cosy together? No: tradition demands that the men clear off to the pub while the women cook on Christmas Day. The cameras follow Jonathon as he sneaks off to the garage to make Debbie's Christmas

present. She is mystified but optimistic. "There is only one thing I can think he might be making. He knows what I want, and have wanted for years, is a jewellery box," she confides.

Christmas Day comes and presents are opened and... Jonathon has not made Debbie a jewellery box. It is a plant stand.

She glances at the camera but puts on a brave face. "I love it. You're very clever," she tells him.

In the Fowler home in the West Midlands, two little sisters

are getting ready for Christmas amid constant bickering. Lauren and Jessica spend a lot of time telling one another how much they get on each other's nerves. Both girls race to open their presents on Christmas day, but later Lauren laments that some of her presents were a bit "half" and Jessica sulks because she didn't get enough.

It is a far cry from the Todd's Christmas in Liverpool. Elaine Todd has been saving £1 a week at the butcher's all year for a turkey and has managed about

£40 — "I was a bit skint some weeks". She gets the tree on Christmas Eve because "they're all reduced by then". Presents are opened seconds past midnight on Christmas Eve, and on Christmas Day her children Billy and Joanne sleep in all morning.

Elaine's sister Bernie comes over for lunch — "We used to fight like cat and dog" — and Billy finally surfaces about noon.

When Joanne gets bored with waiting for food and starts chanting: "Why are we waiting?" Elaine loses her temper.

"Cos I haven't got a sharp knife cleat to cut your throat," she tells her.

Probably the prize for the worst real-life Christmas goes to John Rush, a plain-speaking, hard-drinking Suffolk farmer, who gives a good impression of hating Christmas; his stepchildren, and fun generally. Relations are strained: Damien, his stepson, admits he would not be going home if he was not so poor, and he has not got any presents.

We begin to understand why

when John bans Damien's sister, Abigail, and her boyfriend from the Christmas lunch because she is not dressed smartly enough, and Damien's mother, Sheila, tells the camera that she does not bother to wrap her presents — "it only gets shredded anyway".

As things go from bad to worse Damien promises that he will not be back this year. His plan: "I'm going to have a major beer and pizza event on my own." Happy Christmas anyway, Damien.

Patten lashes 'sick' plan for Hong Kong

Stephen Vines
Hong Kong

Britain has lashed out at Peking over its plans to appoint a new puppet assembly for Hong Kong. In an outspoken interview with *The Independent*, the Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, has said that the appointment of the legislature is "stomach-turning".

On the eve of a special event organised by China to select members of an assembly to rival Hong Kong's Legislative Council, Britain has challenged the Chinese to seek international arbitration to determine the legality of its group.

Using some of the strongest language employed by the Government since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, yesterday accused his Chinese counterpart, Qian Qichen, of breaking a personal pledge, given last April, not to establish a rival legislature before the handover of power next July. He described China's actions as a "serious set-back for the development of representative government in Hong Kong".

While Britain was challenging China to determine the legality of its legislature at a body such as the International Court of Justice, Martin Lee, leader of Hong Kong's Democratic Party, called on the Chinese government to hold meetings of its council in the colony and face a High Court challenge to its legality.

Today 400 members of a selection

committee will gather in the border town of Shenzhen to choose the members who will serve on the rival legislature.

Mr Patten told *The Independent*:

"The actual procedures that we're going to be obliged to witness tomorrow are so stomach-turning.

Here we will have members of this appointed echo chamber, nominating one another, choosing one another, voting for one another. The average tennis club runs its affairs in a more dignified way."

"We also have a position where the people who were defeated in the [1995] Legislative Council elections are seeking to get into this body by the back door," he added, pointing out that leading pro-Peking politicians had vowed not to gain office in this way, yet were putting their names forward for selection.

"There's one simple fact," said the Governor. "Chinese officials don't want to have as many democrats in the Legislative Council as the people of Hong Kong regularly elect."

Mr Rifkind called in the Chinese ambassador, Jiang Enzu, on Thursday night both to issue the arbitration challenge and tell him that Britain expected the Provisional Legislature to be rapidly replaced by "a substantive legislature constituted by genuine elections in the sense in which any reasonable person would understand that term".

Before the statement was issued Mr Patten said: "I certainly am not going to suggest that Xinhua [the NCNA] is going to start saying things which are sensible" about its treaty obligations.

"What on earth do Chinese officials think an international treaty means?" he asked. "An international treaty governing Hong Kong's civil liberties does not mean that come the first of July Britain can walk away from Hong Kong and wash its hands of responsibility... there is a continuing moral commitment by Britain."

In a move to put further pressure on China, Britain also vowed to report every six months to parliament on Hong Kong developments until

Unstitching democracy, page 8



Spellbound: Earth Magician Kevin Carlyon and his high priestess Sandy Jeffreys on the cliffs at Dover yesterday. Photograph: David Rose

Witch report promises safe travel

Steve Boggan

It was reassuring to discover that the High Priest of British witches drives a Volvo, but slightly less comforting to see his broomstick on the back seat.

"Nah," said Kevin Carlyon. "It doesn't fly — well, not unless you've had a few ciders too many."

Mr Carlyon, 37, High Priest of the 576 witches of the Covenant of

Earth Magic, was in Dover planning his latest piece of white magic in a career spanning a couple of decades. This time, it wasn't the exorcism of a stately home or the casting of a spell on a bad road or rail scheme.

It was a ceremony to ensure the safety of Channel Tunnel travellers today, the winter solstice, when history has shown that accidents

have a sad tendency to happen. He

and his partner, Sandy Jeffreys, 44, his High Priestess, decided two weeks ago that they would cast a good spell on the Tunnel after experiencing bad omens about 21 December, the anniversary of, among other tragedies, the Lockerbie air disaster.

"The winter solstice has a four-year cycle in which the forces of earth, air, fire and water are invoked. This year it is fire and we

had a horrible feeling about a fire in the tunnel. But now we have performed our ceremony, everything will be alright," he said.

Thirteen witches, dressed in robes, climbed up Shakespeare Cliff outside Dover at midnight and stood in a circle around an altar chanting: "We summon forth the forces of nature to save and protect those who wish to travel to foreign lands."

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The hidden mountains whose poison all Britain has fled from

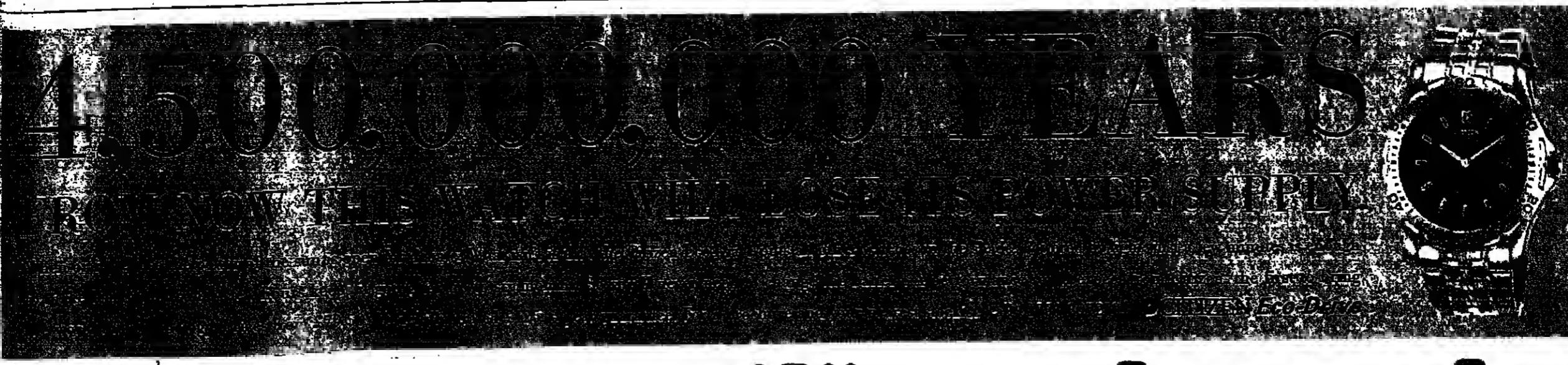
But what are they made of? Discover the answer on page 5

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news

Court told fiancé stabbed in row over hat

Michael Streeter

Tracie Andrews killed her fiancé Lee Harvey after a row over a black woolly hat in the so-called Worcestershire road-rage murder, a court heard yesterday.

Ms Andrews, 27, stabbed Harvey up to 37 times after a history of domestic violence between the couple, Redditch magistrates were told.

Kerry Moreton, prosecuting, said the pair had rowed after she gave him the hat – of a type “associated with black people” – for a joke as they drove home. It was later found in a nearby ditch.

“There is evidence that she produced the hat in the car and there was then an argument,” said Ms

Moreton. She said there was no evidence that two men in a Sierra, one of whom Ms Andrews claimed killed 25-year-old Harvey after a car chase, had existed.

A witness who had seen the couple’s Ford Escort late on 1 December, the night of the murder, saw no sign of another vehicle. “It all points to only two people being there, Mr Harvey and Ms Andrews,” she said.

Ms Andrews, from Alvechurch, Hereford and Worcester, appeared before magistrates having been charged with the murder late on Thursday.

Tim Robinson, her solicitor, successfully applied for reporting restrictions on the case to be lifted, claiming that police evidence against

her was “weak and tenuous”. And he appealed for new witnesses to come forward to corroborate her story.

Ms Andrews’ family had always believed it was not a road-rage killing but a racial attack by the passenger in the Sierra, against a man whose dark skin meant he was “frequently mistaken as coming from the Indian sub-continent and particularly Pakistan,” said Mr Robinson.

During the attack a man – described as overweight and with staring eyes – had called Harvey “a fucking Pakistani”, he added.

Mr Robinson agreed that the couple, who had been together for two years, had an “eventual relationship” but said that they always made up and Ms Andrews regarded



Tracie Andrews: Evidence said to contradict her statement

ed Harvey as a loving man whom she deeply loved. “He was the last person in the world she would have deliberately killed.”

The fact that no knife had been found at the scene at Cooper’s Hill, Alvechurch, or on her person, proved she had not been the killer, said Mr Robinson, who accused the police of “sub-standard investigation”.

Having originally regarded Ms Andrews as a victim of “this wicked crime”, they had then made a volte-face when they failed to find the occupants of the Sierra, he said.

The court also heard that Ms Andrews, who has a daughter, tried to kill herself before she became a suspect because of her grief, and had undergone psychiatric counselling.

But Ms Moreton said that Ms Andrews had had 15 minutes before help arrived to dispose of the knife in a rural area and pointed to evi-

dence that contradicted her account. Despite widespread appeals no one had reported seeing the Sierra that night, Ms Andrews had failed to take its number plate and the defendant had claimed the Sierra had chosen to stop near a house at another occasion at Mr Harvey.

Witnesses had also referred to “animosity” between the pair on the day of the murder and a clamp of her hair had been found near Mr Harvey’s hand at the murder scene, she said.

Ms Andrews, who appeared at a police press conference two days after the murder to appeal for witnesses to come forward, was granted bail on condition that she lived with her mother. But the prosecution immediately lodged an appeal and Ms Andrews was detained in custody pending the appeal at a Crown Court which is expected to be heard within the next 48 hours.

Polls on Philip rigged by guns lobby

Marianne Macdonald
Media Correspondent

Members of the gun lobby yesterday admitted to an organised campaign to rig Thursday’s phone-in polls on Prince Philip and his comments on guns.

The polls were carried out separately by BBC’s Radio 5 Live and Sky News to test public support for the Duke of Edinburgh’s controversial comments on 5 Live that if Thomas Hamilton had killed the Dunblane children with a cricket bat, the game of cricket would not face a ban.

His views ignited a storm of outrage from MPs and anti-gun campaigners. But the overwhelming majority of listeners – 68 per cent who phoned Radio 5 Live and 72 per cent to Sky News – apparently sided with the Prince.

Yesterday, however, *The Independent* obtained evidence of a deliberate campaign to sway the polls to support the views of the pro-gun lobby.

It was made by CyberShooters, a group of 160 gun supporters who are members of an electronic mailing list and who use the Internet to exchange views.

One message from the group advised: “Sky News are conducting a poll today on Prince Philip’s comments. Tel: 0891 665531. Remember to dial 141 before you dial the number so that you can make multiple votes.”

Another message urged: “Please register your support for Prince Philip. Phone the Palace ... phone the BBC ... e-mail the BBC.” It also gave the appropriate numbers to call.

A third message suggested the text of a letter of support to the Duke and gave details of how to address him. “Please bury him with letters of support. This is a ‘poll’ we shall win,” it concluded.

A fourth message read: “STOP PRESS. Shooters win Radio 5 phone poll by more than 2:1, 68 per cent agree with HRH. 32 percent disagree. Well done folks!”

Yesterday it emerged that a chartered engineer, Peter Jackson, who runs a Scotland-based company called Forge Consulting, was behind the campaign as the administrator of CyberShooters.

He was unrepentant, however. “I understand that criticism may be levelled against us for extorting people to vote twice, but the radio programmes don’t say we can’t. This is not a general election. This is a phone poll. The fact that the anti-gun lobby haven’t done the same is possibly an expression of how bored they are all getting with it.”



Blowing his trumpet: The Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, recording an hour-long programme for Jazz FM yesterday, to be broadcast on Boxing Day. Mr Clarke will be playing his favourite tracks and explaining how he came to like jazz

Photograph: Keith Dobney

Leak reveals secret plan to provoke walk-out by ground staff

Ministry helps BA to defeat strikers

Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

The Ministry of Defence has been co-operating with a secret plan to dismiss up to 3,000 British Airways ground staff if they go on strike.

A confidential BA document leaked to *The Independent* reveals that hundreds of senior Heathrow employees have been training for strike-breaking duties at RAF Wroughton, Wiltshire.

The memorandum reveals that under the “snow plan”, managers would be needed to keep a basic service running for four to six weeks until outside contractors were brought in on a permanent basis. The recruitment of an alternative workforce was now a “priority”, according to the paper.

Around 1,600 managers, around half of the total number at Heathrow, would be drafted in to fulfil all the duties of the ground staff responsible for stowing baggage and freight and towing aircraft into position.

The plan forms the biggest such covert operation since Rupert Murdoch recruited a shadow workforce for his Wap-

ping print works but much of the labour movement’s fury will be directed at the Ministry of Defence for allowing its property to be used for such a plan. RAF Wroughton is a hospital base which is being sold, but is still owned by the MoD.

In the internal BA memo, management discloses its concern that a plan to cut £1bn from costs by 2000 has encountered most opposition from ground staff, who are seen as the “highest area of risk” for industrial action.

According to union sources, managers are talking about “day zero”, scheduled for 15 January, when the company will impose new employment conditions hoping to provoke a walk-out. Management has demanded agreement over the changes by 10 January.

As part of the contingency plan some managers will have to be trained on wide-bodied jets such as the 747 and 767. Senior employees have already gained experience of the 767, but directors are insisting that training on the 747 take place away from Heathrow so that suspicion is not aroused. The memo reveals that a TriStar

had been found at Bournemouth which was being evaluated for its suitability.

Union officials argue that there are inevitably safety implications when only partially trained managers are towing large aircraft with thousands of gallons of fuel on board.

The “snow plan” was originally envisaged as a means of providing up to 75 per cent of services during severe weather. Under the strike-breaking strategy, it is envisaged that the limited timetable could be provided by managers.

George Ryde, a national officer at the Transport and General Workers’ Union, called the tactics dishonest and unethical and said they smacked of corporate paranoia.

“We see ourselves as saving BA from itself. We are not going to be goaded into industrial action,” he said. “With talk of a ‘day zero’ they seem to be adopting a PöP approach. It’s impossible to ask our staff to cooperate with company plans to reduce their terms and conditions if they’ve got a hidden agenda to dispose of workers.”

BA said it was attempting to reduce costs.

Coalition urges boycott of Sony over crash film

Andrew Brown
Religious Affairs Correspondent

An ad-hoc coalition of Muslim and Christian fundamentalists is threatening to boycott Sony products in protest against the film *Crash*.

Yusuf Islam, formerly known as Cat Stevens, has joined forces with Cornerstone Ministries, a fundamentalist church group based in Surrey, to try and prevent the film being distributed in this country.

In a letter to a co-president of the Japanese conglomerate, the coalition said: “This alliance is prepared to zealously recommend that each particular group advises its assembly, congregation, or community to stop purchasing Sony products until this film is either banned or discarded.” The proposed boycott would not start until 8 January.

The film, directed by David Cronenberg and based on the novel by JG Ballard, describes the life of a group of perverts who gain pleasure from car crashes, and includes a sex scene involving a woman wearing calipers. The film has already been banned by Westminster City Council, which prevents it being shown in the

West End of London. It has not yet been issued with a certificate by the British Board of Film Classification.

This is violently attacked as exceeding all possible limits of taste, and defended by 50 leading film makers as a work of art which should be released uncut.

Six Muslim organisations have signed up to the appeal, among them the Bradford Council of Mosques and the self-selected Muslim parliament.

Eight Christian groups have also signed. Three are the English branches of American television evangelists, among them Bill Hyatt Media Missionaries and Team Thrust UK.

Campaigns against Hollywood values are gaining currency in the USA, where Christian groups have protested against the Disney corporation for distributing the film *Print* – which concerned the struggles of a gay priest in Liverpool – as well as giving benefits to gay employees.

But this is the first time such a campaign has attracted support from both Muslim and Christian fundamentalists. The coalition against the film claims to have 105,000 on its mailing lists.

significant shorts

Retrial for man in Leah ecstasy case

Hillsborough damages: police to appeal

A teenager accused of being involved in buying the ecstasy tablet which killed Leah Betts is to face a retrial next year.

Steven Packman, 18, of Landion, Essex, will stand trial in February at Norwich Crown Court. A jury failed to reach a verdict earlier this week after a seven-day trial. Mr Packman had denied the charge.

His former friend, Stephen Smith, 19, of Basildon, Essex, was given a two-year conditional discharge at the same court yesterday after admitting the same offence. The judge told him: “Go back and spread the message as to just how dangerous ecstasy is. If in doing that you stop some other person from taking this drug with tragic consequences you will have made up in some part for what you did.”

Schools exodus to be stemmed

Burnt-out teachers’ hopes of retiring early next Easter to beat a government clampdown are likely to be dashed by plans to impose cash penalties on authorities who permit an exodus of staff. Teaching unions predicted mass departures of staff over 50 after ministers announced proposals to change pension rules in an attempt to cut high levels of early retirement. But new guidance from the Department for Education and Employment on the proposed changes will make it prohibitively expensive for employers to let too many teachers go. Lucy Ward

Councillor jailed for fraud

A Labour councillor was jailed for six months yesterday for defrauding his own authority in a housing benefit fiddle. Chris Wright, 49, a former chairman of Thanet’s housing benefit committee, had his wife pose as his sister to claim £9,376 benefits, Maidstone Crown Court was told. Brenda Wright was put on probation and ordered to do 100 hours of community service.

Death of top astronomer

The US astronomer Carl Sagan has died, aged 62, of pneumonia, after a long illness caused by bone marrow disease. Obituary, page 12

THE INDEPENDENT ABROAD

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Nigeria	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Pakistan	£2.00	Colombia £4.500
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Algeria	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Angola	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Argentina	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Bolivia	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Burkina Faso	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Burundi	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Cameroon	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Chad	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Comoros	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Djibouti	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Egypt	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Eritrea	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Guinea-Bissau	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Ivory Coast	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Kenya	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Liberia	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Madagascar	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Mali	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Mauritania	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Morocco	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Niger	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Nigeria	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Senegal	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Somalia	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Togo	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Tunisia	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Uganda	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500
Zimbabwe	£2.00	Costa Rica £4.500

BACK ISSUES

Back issues of the *Independent* are available from Helicon Newsagents, telephone 01992 640370.

Christmas tales: Lost, found and missing

Mother who attacked husband's mistress walks free in tears

Charlie Bain

Debbie Smith, jailed for nine months for assaulting her husband's mistress with a stiletto-heeled shoe, was reunited with her three children for Christmas after her sentence was yesterday quashed by the Court of Appeal.

The appeal court judge was critical of the original trial judge for sending Mrs Smith to prison. She was a "hard-working, good mother and has been a good wife," he said.

He added that she had never committed an offence and the trial judge should have paid regard to the fact that Mr Smith was the author of his own misfortunes.

"We think the learned judge took a far too restrictive view of this attack," said Lord Justice Bedlam.

Outside the High Court Mrs Smith, 29, a diminutive figure in a black suit, sobbed and clutched a photo of her son as she was hustled out of the back entrance by representatives from a tabloid newspaper.

In a statement issued by the paper last night Mrs Smith thanked the public and media who supported her in her fight for justice: "I am obviously delighted at the court's decision today," she said. "But I have been through a terrible ordeal and now just want to be reunited with my children."

She had cried throughout the hearing and collapsed in the dock and had to be carried from the courtroom after hearing the verdict. She had served just seven days of the nine-month

sentence and returned to her home in Manchester last night to be reunited with her children.

She was sent to prison by Judge Peter Lakin at Manchester Crown Court last Friday when she admitted assaulting her best friend, Francine French, whom she caught having an affair with her estranged husband Jeffrey. The severity of the sentence on a woman with no previous convictions sparked a public outcry and several campaigns for her release.

Replacing her sentence with a year's probation yesterday, Lord Justice Bedlam said that the offence did not merit a custodial sentence and said that Judge Lakin should have considered what jail would mean for the "caring mother" and her three children.

Describing the background to the case, Nick Clarke, representing Mrs Smith, said that her marriage had collapsed earlier this year and although the couple had a close relationship they were living at different addresses.

The pair were childhood sweethearts who had "enjoyed a very long and happy" marriage during which they had four children, Emma, 11, Jeffrey, nine, Jonathan, seven, and Andrew, who died from a brain haemorrhage when he was nine months old.

Mr Clarke said that "things had come to a head" in August, when Mr Smith made love to his estranged wife and returned to his brother's home, where he was staying. When Mrs Smith went round to the house the next morning she discovered he

had stayed overnight with Mrs French, the wife of her former next-door neighbour, who had become her best friend during the split with her husband.

"She wanted to confront them with their betrayal and went to her brother-in-law's house and went into the bedroom, where Mrs French was drying her hair, and wearing her husband's T-shirt."

Her husband then emerged from the shower wearing boxer shorts. "Mrs French's reaction she took as a smile or smirk in a mocking manner and she struck out with a shoe she was carrying." The heel of the stiletto shoe caused two wounds, which each needed a stitch. Mrs Smith suffered more serious injuries in the ensuing fight, including a fractured wrist, strained neck and bruises on her body and face.

Calling for an "act of mercy" from the Court of Appeal, Mr Clarke said that the mother of three had been severely traumatised by the jail sentence and had to undergo heavy sedation in the hospital wing at Risley Prison, near Warrington, Cheshire, where she had been for the past week.

"She believes the sentence has destroyed her life and parted her from her children and the children are very upset by the removal of their mother ..."

"Whilst the mother was away, the two younger children were removed from their school by their father against their wishes."

He said all three children were now back with their maternal grandparents.



Gotcha: Mrs Smith leaving court yesterday with representatives of a tabloid newspaper. Photograph: Jeff Moore

Mystery of the Yuletide cards from nowhere

Catherine Wild, a widow, has been receiving Christmas cards from the same family for the past 17 years. This year the usual card dropped through her letter box from "Pat and Roger and family" with an extra card they want passed on to Annie Muriel.

Mrs Wild, aged 67, has not the faintest idea who is sending the cards.

"You would have thought at some time one of them might have got in touch to ask 'did you get my card?' ... They feel like old friends. I'd love to know if the person who should be receiving the cards is still alive or has emigrated."

"And it would be nice to meet the people sending the cards so I could shake their hand and give them a Christmas card with my best wishes."

Mrs Wild, the former owner of an engineering firm, started receiving the cards in 1979 after she bought her three-bedroom detached house in Worcester from a woman called Dawn.

She spent years quizzing neighbours in a bid to solve the puzzle. But now she has given up and puts the card in a place of honour every Christmas.

Her only clues are that the cards have a Gloucester postmark and are addressed to Mrs R Hales, and they contain a message sending best wishes to "Ann and Roger and family".

This year's card to Mrs Hales shows a church covered in snow. Annie Muriel's card shows a teddy bear playing a violin and is addressed to "Mrs M Larkin c/o Mrs R Hales". The greeting inside says: "To Annie Muriel with best wishes from Pat, Roger and family".

"If only I knew who she was," said Mrs Wild.

Churches seek to feed refugees denied benefits



Shelter: Refugees sharing a meal at the Welcare centre in Brent, north-west London. Photograph: Edward Sykes

Andrew Brown
Religious Affairs Correspondent

This Christmas, hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers will be fed and helped by Christian groups because many are now not eligible for benefits. And for the first time in 50 years, the Red Cross will be distributing food parcels in Britain – to 200 asylum seekers who attend a day centre in south London.

The changes in the benefits laws introduced by the Government were opposed by Cardinal Basil Hume and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, and now churches in many parts of the country are trying to mitigate the effects of the new rules. The Bible is much clearer about asylum seekers than about sexual morality: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong" God said to Moses; and later, "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love

him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

In one of the dingy suburban streets of Brent in north-west London, a church hall has become a meeting place and feeding station for some of the 1,200 refugees in London left stranded by the present regulations. It is one of many such shelters. There is one in Brixton, south of the Thames, to which people have walked five miles for a meal. At the Welcare centre in Brent, they provide food parcels, communal meals once a week for up to 120 people, about half of them children, and legal services and help with welfare bureaucracy to many more.

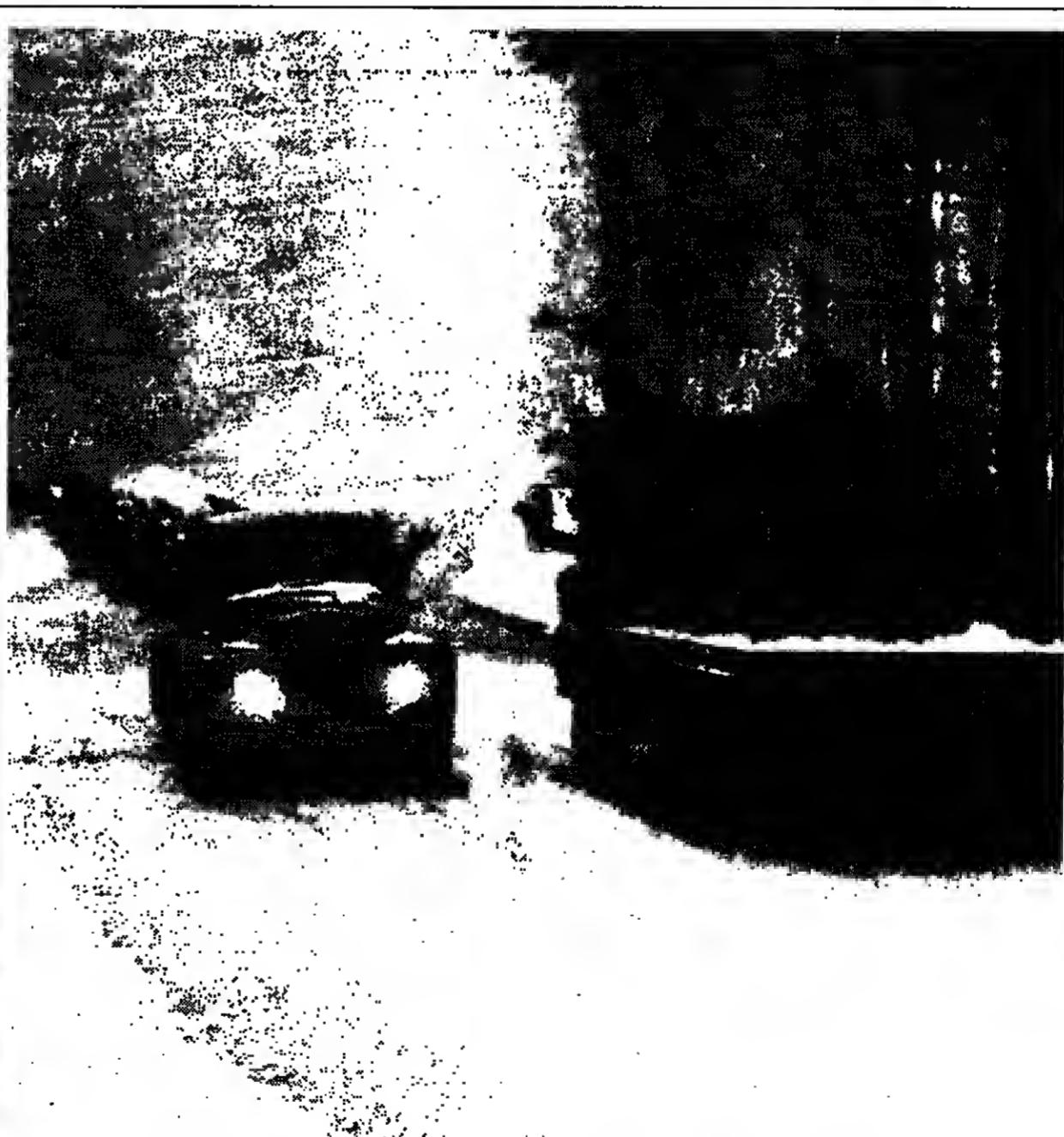
Although the Court of Appeal decided last autumn that local authorities had a duty to help save such people from destitution, this decision is being appealed against by the Government, and in the meantime, the levels of support being offered are hardly generous. The Church Urban Fund, an Anglican charity set up in 1985,

knows of one mother with two children who is given £2 a day to feed them all, and another man expected to live on a diet of bread and milk.

Peter Stobart, who set up the Brent Welcare centre, came there from Hong Kong, where he had worked for 10 years with people who slept on the streets. Out there, he said, people simply died if they had no family to look after them. In London, things were still better than that. "The ones who come here have all got a roof over their heads. At the moment nobody has ended up on the street yet," he said.

Many of the refugees have left scenes of considerable horror. One 20-year-old Angolan boy had fingers chopped off while being tortured. In another Angolan family, nine-year-old boy was killed and his mother raped in front of the other children because their father – whom the attackers had come for – had fled.

Maha, an Iraqi woman in the



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JACK DANIEL'S TENNESSEE WHISKEY

DoH letter 'copied' from drug lobby firm

Official accused of lifting denial over chemical spray link to BSE

Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

The Department of Health has come under fire after one of its civil servants used large chunks of text supplied by drug company representatives in a letter to a concerned member of the public.

The use of extensive wording from the National Office of Animal Health Limited (Noah) by the middle-ranking official raises questions about the department's independence. Noah represents the companies which make veterinary drugs.

The letter was written to Dr Peter Gold in East Brent, Somerset, by Dr Tim Marrs, a branch leader in the department covering pesticides and veterinary medicines. Dr Gold had sent a letter to the department calling it to investigate an alleged link between the use of organophosphorus (OP) chemicals as a veterinary medicine and the spread of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE).

The Independent has seen Dr Marrs' reply, written last month and aimed at demolishing any suggestion of a connection.

Three quarters of his 500-word letter is virtually identical to a "position paper" on the alleged link between OPs and BSE published earlier this year by Noah. There were minor changes in sentence order, a few extra words inserted (such as "you should note that") and a few sentences were cut.

Having seen the letter, Noah's communications executive Alison Glennon said: "They [the Department of Health] have taken it from our document." She said Noah had no problem with the department doing this. "We're quite happy about it – what we said is all in the public domain."

But the department denied Dr Marrs had simply duplicated

most of the text from Noah, claiming that both his words and those used by the drugs companies' representative had been cleared by the Government's Veterinary Medicines Directorate and had used information from the European Commission.

"The facts in both documents are true and you'd expect them to be very similar if they drew on the same sources," said a spokeswoman.

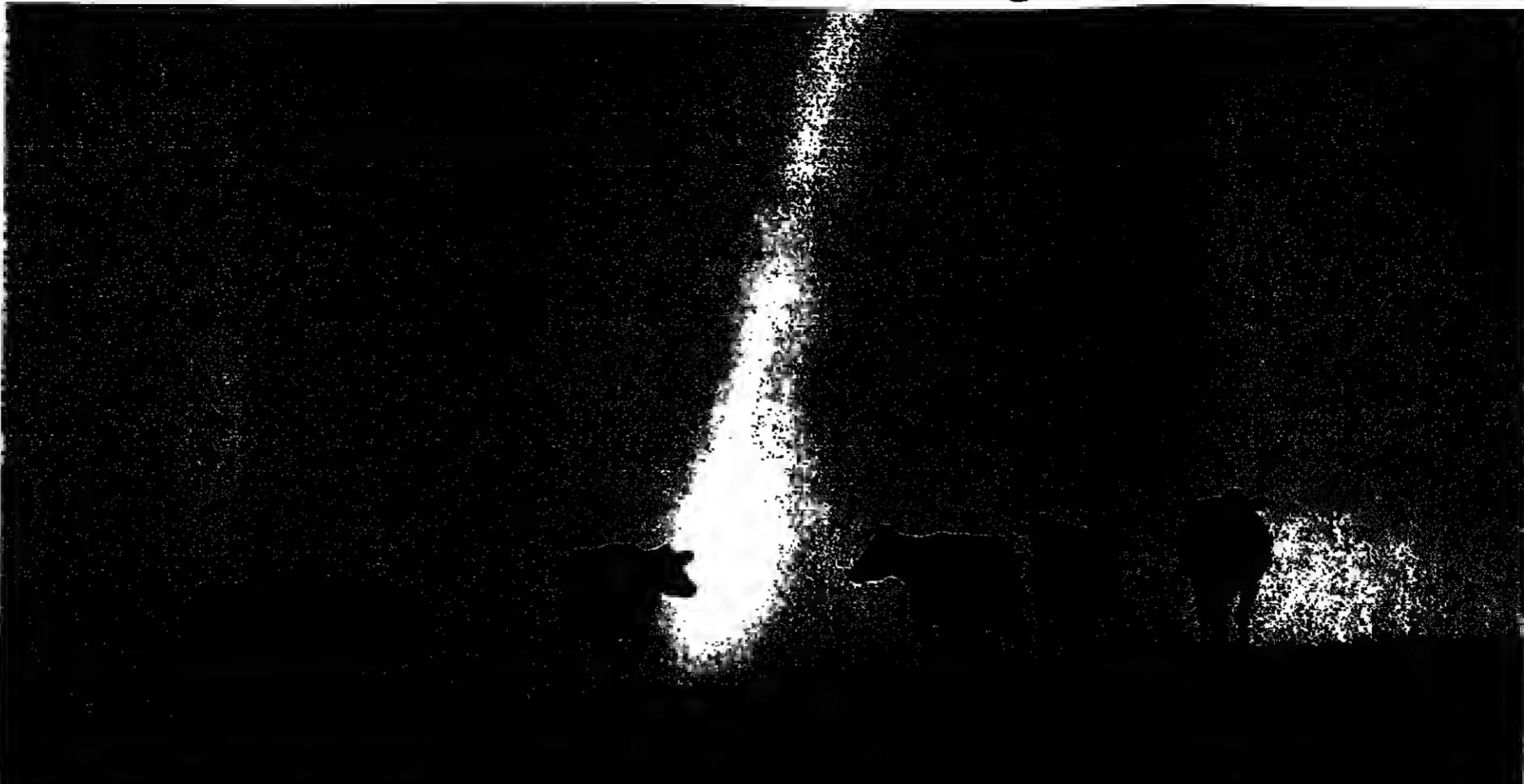
The match between the two was spotted by Mark Purdey, the Somerset dairy farmer who first suggested the OP-BSE link, after Dr Gold, a university lecturer and Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate, sent him the correspondence. "As Government continually insist on their totally no-hands-in-glove relationship with the chemical giants, this letter sadly betrays their true position," he says.

Mr Purdey believes the pouring of OP chemicals, which are powerful insecticides, onto the backs of cattle to control warble fly infestation in the 1980s sparked the BSE epidemic. OPs are the chemicals used in sheep dip which are alleged to have destroyed the health of many farmers and are thought to be behind Gulf War syndrome.

The Government, the OP manufacturers and most scientists studying the epidemic say the OP-BSE theory fails to hold water. They prefer the theory that the epidemic originated when feed containing the remains of sheep with scrapie was eaten by cattle.

According to this disease agent, a protein, became established in cows and spread rapidly as rendered, ground-up cattle remains were then fed to cattle. But Mr Purdey says further important evidence to back his alternative will soon emerge. "I'm really excited about the future of it," he said.

... All that's left of these cattle grazing on our green and pleasant land



Killing fields: The beef cull backlog has been cleared but there are thousands of tonnes of meat and bonemeal powder left to be incinerated

Photograph: Jeffrey Phelps

Burning question for the slaughter mountain

Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

Six warehouses in Britain hold the strangest and saddest of all farm surplus mountains. More than a million cows have been turned into great mounds of grey brown powder – the meat and bone meal which remain after the great slaughter of cattle caused by the BSE epidemic.

Three warehouses are full, and the Government's Intervention Board for Agriculture – which runs the slaughter programme – has had to press three others into service. The same board used to store the notorious grain and beef mountains produced by the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy.

This week the Government proudly declared that – as promised – it had cleared the backlog of cattle waiting to be killed under the over-30-month-old scheme. Some 1,100,000 animals have died.

But it still has to deal with the huge and growing hazardous waste disposal problem posed by the 135,000 tonnes of powder – what remains of the cattle.

The flesh and bone after it has been minced, cooked, heat-dried and ground up by the rendering industry.

The Government says all of this material has to be incinerated to destroy the BSE agent – an extraordinarily resilient protein. But very little of the incineration capacity has been secured. The burning has to happen at 850°C or higher to ensure the infectivity is destroyed.

Meanwhile, fresh meat and bone meal and tallow continue to arrive in the stockpiles. For a start, there are 230,000 cattle which are now frozen in cold stores.

Then there are the 18,000 or so cattle which will continue to be slaughtered each week now that the backlog has been cleared. Finally, there are another 100,000 dairy cattle to be killed in a further cull which was announced by the Government this week.

The Government has been £5m to make the necessary modifications to a power station boiler.

The Intervention Board has one incineration contract with a toxic waste disposal company, Rechem. But its high temperature incinerator at Hythe, in Hampshire, will only handle 20,000 tonnes of meat and bone meal a year.

A spokesman for National Power said it would cost about £5m to make the necessary modifications to a power station boiler.

meat and bone meal. It also wants to burn large numbers of carcasses directly without rendering and hopes to have 10 incinerators in action soon. It already has a contract with another incinerator to burn 2,000 carcasses a week, and hopes to quadruple this.

Jean Aly, of the Intervention Board, said: "There's no problem or health hazard in storing [the carcasses] for a long time but we'd prefer not to."

Tebbit rebukes Major over Tory cheating

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

The Prime Minister backed down yesterday over allegations that the Government cheated in the "pairing" row as he came under attack from a former Tory party chairman over the incident.

John Major said in a television interview that the row over government whips deliberately pairing some of their MPs with more than one opposition member in order to win a crucial vote on Monday was "arcane".

But Lord Tebbit, writing in *The Sun* newspaper, said he believed the Government had been involved in foul play. "I call that cheating. I asked three former Tory chief whips. They all called it cheating. I could not find any senior Tory, except ministers, who thought that it was a proper way to behave. Most

of them, too, called it cheating." Lord Tebbit reminded his readers that the last time an MP was accused of cheating on a pairing arrangement was 20 years ago. Michael Heseltine was so incensed that he lost control and swung the parliamentary mace around his head.

Mr Major, whose party had compounded its problems by falsely accusing Labour of cheating on Tuesday in order to defeat the Government on its Stalking Bill, said there seemed to have been some mistake.

Even without that, the Government would have won Monday's fisheries vote, he added. "Pairing arrangements generally are personal arrangements, though sometimes they're conducted on a different level. Quite what misunderstandings occurred here, I don't know."

Mr Major agreed that it would matter if the public felt

politicians had behaved dishonourably, but added that he did not believe that had happened.

Donald Dewar, Labour's chief whip, responded: "When he was questioned today about his party's cheating, John Major was both evasive and defensive. It is time for a full and public apology from Michael Heseltine and Brian Mahon, who are still pathetically trying to defend the indefensible."

Labour was claiming a victory in the pairing war last night. Accusations that it, too, had cheated by allowing 15 MPs to vote on Tuesday when they had promised not to do so had proved to be false in 13 of the cases. The other two MPs apologised for voting without knowing what they were doing. "It was like Pavlov's dogs. I just heard the bells," one said.

BBC defends decision to break last taboo by filming death

Marianne Macdonald
Media Correspondent

The BBC defended itself yesterday against the accusation of being "unbelievably insensitive" in its attempts to break the last television taboo: by showing people dying of illness for a major science series.

Mary Whitehouse, founder of the Viewers' and Listeners' Association which recently backed the BBC's campaign for a higher licence fee, said showing such events would be "an intrusion into family grief with the whole world watching".

She added: "I would like to see the governors look into it and give their verdict. I would be surprised if they approved."

The BBC's newly updated producer's guidelines, adhered to which is written into staff contracts, says: "The dead

should be treated with respect and not shown unless there are compelling reasons for doing so. Close-ups should generally be avoided. When such scenes are justified they must not be lingered over."

But a BBC spokesman said that while filming was continuing for the series of "several" terminally ill patients, one with cancer, it was with the permission of the patients, their doctors and their relatives.

"We have not decided whether to film their death," she said. "If that decision was taken, it would be taken with the full, informed consent of the patient and their relatives, and it would also never be shown without the greatest respect for the sensibilities of viewers."

"We would also like to add that these people have given the subject of their death a lot of

thought. This in itself may help those who face what is a very frightening but universal experience."

The 45m BBC1 series, with the working title *The Human Body*, is scheduled for transmission in 1998. It is to attempt to do for human biology what *The Private Life of Plants* did for the world's flora. It will cover the seven ages of man, from conception to grave, in seven 50-minute episodes and represents the BBC's first attempt in 20 years to tackle a comprehensive study of the subject.

The series is the brainchild of Jana Bennett, head of the BBC's science department.

While acknowledging the final programme on dying and death will raise ethical issues, she told *Broadcast* magazine: "The processes of death are fundamental to basic biology."

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news

Historic amputation takes its place at cutting edge of drama



This won't hurt: Actors and anaesthetists at University College Hospital in London re-enact the leg amputation of Frederick Churchill, a butler and the first patient in England to be publicly placed under surgical anaesthesia - on 21 December 1846, at the hospital! Photograph: John Voss

Mother, 22, who killed baby is put on probation

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

The despairing daughter of a millionaire who killed her newborn baby son after secretly giving birth, yesterday agreed to undergo treatment as a condition of a three-year probation order.

Emma Gifford, 22, the daughter of retired Rank Organisation chief executive Michael Gifford, had felt unable to tell anyone about the pregnancy, which followed the birth of another child she had given up for adoption 14 months earlier.

The first her family knew of the second birth last April was when her brother eventually found the baby's body in the freezer at her flat in South Kensington, south-west London. Family support groups described the case as "tragic".

Initially, there was insufficient evidence for police to bring a charge of infanticide. But Gifford later made full confession in an attempt to recover from the double trauma of the death and the adoption of her first son, William Boyce, prosecution counsel, told the Old Bailey in London.

Gifford, who the court heard had suffered from depression since she was 13 and had dropped out of university, was asked to keep the pregnancy secret because she barely showed any physical signs.

One night last April she returned from her work at a

florist at about midnight and gave birth in the bathroom floor two to three hours later. She agonised over the secret baby until 5pm the next day. "She felt as though she had no option. She didn't know what to do," Mr Boyce said.

She told police that she placed a flannel over the baby's face, covered his head with a pair of her boyfriend's pyjama bottoms and then put a pillow over his head for a couple of minutes. She was sick, then got ready for work, later wrapping the body in clothes and a plastic bag. After confessing, Gifford pleaded guilty to infanticide.

Rebecca Poulet QC, defending, said that during child-

hood Gifford had been caught between an alcoholic mother and an absent father who worked long hours.

Sir Lawrence Verney, the Recorder of London, told Gifford: "The law realises that immediately at and after giving birth there may be a time when the balance in the mother's mind is disturbed by reason of her not having recovered from the effects of giving birth." Her decision to go to the police was "very much to your credit".

Another charge of attempting to conceal the birth was ordered to lie on the file.

Emma Gifford discovered that she was expecting the first child in 1994 but did not dare to tell either her boyfriend, Joseph Ernst, a former architecture student at university, or her father, and gave birth in hospital without the support of friends or family.

A long search for an adoptive family and Mr Ernst's decision to split up with Gifford took its toll on her state of mind and was to contribute to her deep trauma when she discovered that she was again pregnant by Mr Ernst in 1995.

A spokeswoman for the Family Planning Association said: "The case does emphasise the need to make sure that young people know there are agencies designed to listen and provide support in this kind of situation. It is just tragic that this young woman didn't feel she could turn to them for help."



Emma Gifford leaving the Old Bailey yesterday

Unions move to sign up child workers

Lucy Ward
Education Correspondent

Schoolchildren, some as young as 13, are being signed up as members by trade unions amid concern that thousands nationwide are working illegally for unscrupulous employers.

Employers are legally obliged to register workers up to 16 with local education authorities, but in practice the majority ignore the system. This means that there is no control over the hours children are working, or whether they are filling unsuitable jobs - such as on building sites or in factories.

The GMB general workers' union has signed up 200 children after visiting schools and offering pupils free membership in a deal that entitles them to free legal advice if they have problems at work. The recruitment drive, launched in a pilot programme in Newcastle upon Tyne and due to be extended next year, was devised after research revealed that an estimated 600,000 children were working outside the law in evening and weekend jobs.

A report from the Labour Research Department last year found that seven out of eight child workers were doing so illegally, while only 15 out of 108

education authorities had child-employment officers.

Last week, a study by Unicef, the United Nations children's organisation, suggested that one-quarter of British 11-year-olds were working, raising concerns over the effect on their education.

Chris Preston of the GMB's northern office said that the union wanted to offer them some form of protection. Those who are not registered are not covered by insurance at work, so they may not receive compensation if they have an accident.

Mr Preston said: "The laws dealing with children's employment are outdated and not designed to cope with the situation in the Nineties." The recruitment drive allowed the union to find out more about the extent of illegal employment of children, he said.

Mounting concern over the welfare of those employed outside the law comes as the Department of Health prepares to abolish the two-hour limit for children working on Sundays. Draft plans would permit 13- and 14-year-olds to work for five hours and 15- and 16-year-olds for 10 hours. At present, a 15-year-old can work for two hours on school days and Sundays and eight hours on Saturday.

Animals' rough sea crossings 'lawful'

A High Court judge yesterday rejected accusations by animal rights protesters that the Agriculture Minister, Douglas Hogg, was operating an unlawful policy which allowed ferries carrying farm animals to the Continent to sail in bad weather conditions likely to cause live cargoes injury and suffering.

The accusations were made during a court hearing packed with animal rights campaigners including the television screen writer, Carla Lane.

The Protesters Animal Information Network (Pain) argued that ferry operators were allowed, for commercial reasons, to sail in rough weather when vessel inspectors ought to be stopping them.

But Mr Justice Latham ruled:

"In the light of the evidence it is not possible to conclude that [the Ministry of Agriculture] have put in place or are operating an unlawful policy."

Pain director Ms Lane said: "The fact is we did prove that animals went out in rough seas contrary to the rules. The minister, we feel, was responsible. But we could not actually prove that he

had a policy of not intervening and stopping them."

Pain was attacking the activities of animal ferry operators based at Channel ports including Dover, Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, and Brightlingsea, Essex. Its counsel, Richard Barton, argued that Mr Hogg was under a duty imposed by the 1994 Welfare of Animals during Transport Order to prevent "serious risk of injury, suffering or death" to animals bound for the Continent but had failed to issue the appropriate guidelines to inspectors, and they had failed to act.

He said in rough weather the chartered boats - smaller vessels than cross-Channel passenger ferries - rolled considerably, putting the animal cargoes at risk of injury.

Dismissing their application for judicial review, the judge ordered the protesters to pay the ministry's legal costs, estimated at about £30,000.

Later Ms Lane said: "We are enraged. This evil trade appears to be protected and once again the people of this country have been ignored."

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Peking unstitches banner of democracy

A defiant China is tightening its grip on power.
Stephen Vines reports from Hong Kong

Hong Kong — The final piece of China's rival power structure in Hong Kong will be slotted into place today when a 400-strong committee meets in the border town of Shenzhen to select members of a Provisional Legislative Council which will run in tandem with the elected legislature for the last six months of colonial rule.

Despite the strong British protests issued yesterday, the new body is likely to remain in existence for 18 months, after which China has promised to hold elections, but under a system more closely resembling the colonial electoral system abolished in 1994 and replaced by a widening of the franchise.

The Hong Kong government under Governor Chris Patten refuses to recognise the provisional council and will not cooperate. His successor, Tung Chee-hwa, has repeatedly urged Mr Patten to "face reality" and offer support for the new body.

One aspect of this reality is that the provisional legislature will not have a single member who is unacceptable to the Chinese government. One hundred and thirty candidates have put their names forward for the 60 seats on offer. All have been vetted and approved by Chinese officials who were assayed by the refusal of any members of the democratic camp to offer themselves for selection.

However, there are some vice-premier, who is presiding

nominal democrats in the line-up of hopefuls, notably members of a party called the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood which has emerged as China's chosen vehicle for the expression of "acceptable" pro-democracy views.

The hard-core democrats, mainly in the Democratic Party, Hong Kong's largest and most popular party, will have nothing to do with contest, although a renegade member is trying to secure selection.

China hopes that in the next 18 months the popular democrats can be sufficiently marginalised to ensure that they are no longer a major electoral force when something approaching a real election is called.

The problem is that China's plans to give credibility to the new body are being undermined by members of the selection committee which will choose the new legislators. Many of the members have spent the past few days trying to fix up closed-door deals under which they will vote for each other and limit the number of candidates they select to minimise the chances of success for those excluded from the deals.

The horse-trading has come to light mainly because much of it has been unsuccessful. However, the shadow it is casting over the exercise was sufficient to cause Qian Qichen, China's vice-premier, who is presiding

over the process, to issue a warning against the forming of cabals to pick members.

Another problem for the new body is that 26 candidates for selection were defeated in the 1995 elections and give every appearance of trying to overturn the popular mandate by ignoring the election.

In the aftermath of his defeat in the 1995 election, Tsang Yuk-ying, leader of the main pro-China party, told *The Independent* he would definitely not be seeking membership of the provisional body because this would give the impression of gaining "backdoor" admission to the legislature. Mr Tsang has since changed his mind and is standing alongside 12 of his party colleagues.

Most analysts believe that a large number of previously defeated candidates will win seats. They are likely to be joined by some heavyweight pro-Peking personalities, such as Leung Chun-ying, who is seen as a future head of government.

Also standing are 34 members of the existing 60-member Legislative Council, including its president, Andrew Wong. As



Red flag: A pro-democracy protestor wrapped in a banner bearing a petition clashes with Hong Kong police in Shenzhen yesterday. Photograph: Reuters

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£25,000+	5.93	4.00	3.14	3.19	3.78	3.85	3.93	4.00	3.14
£10,000+	3.20	2.55	2.56	2.59	3.06	3.10	5.11	3.15	2.49
£3,000+	2.96	5.00	2.37	2.38	2.81	2.85	2.81	2.85	2.27
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£2,500+	2.65	—	2.12	—	2.50	—	2.40	—	1.92
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£25,000+	4.60	4.68	3.68	3.73	4.60	4.68	3.85	3.91	3.08
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21st December 1996

Gingrich pressed on cash falsehood

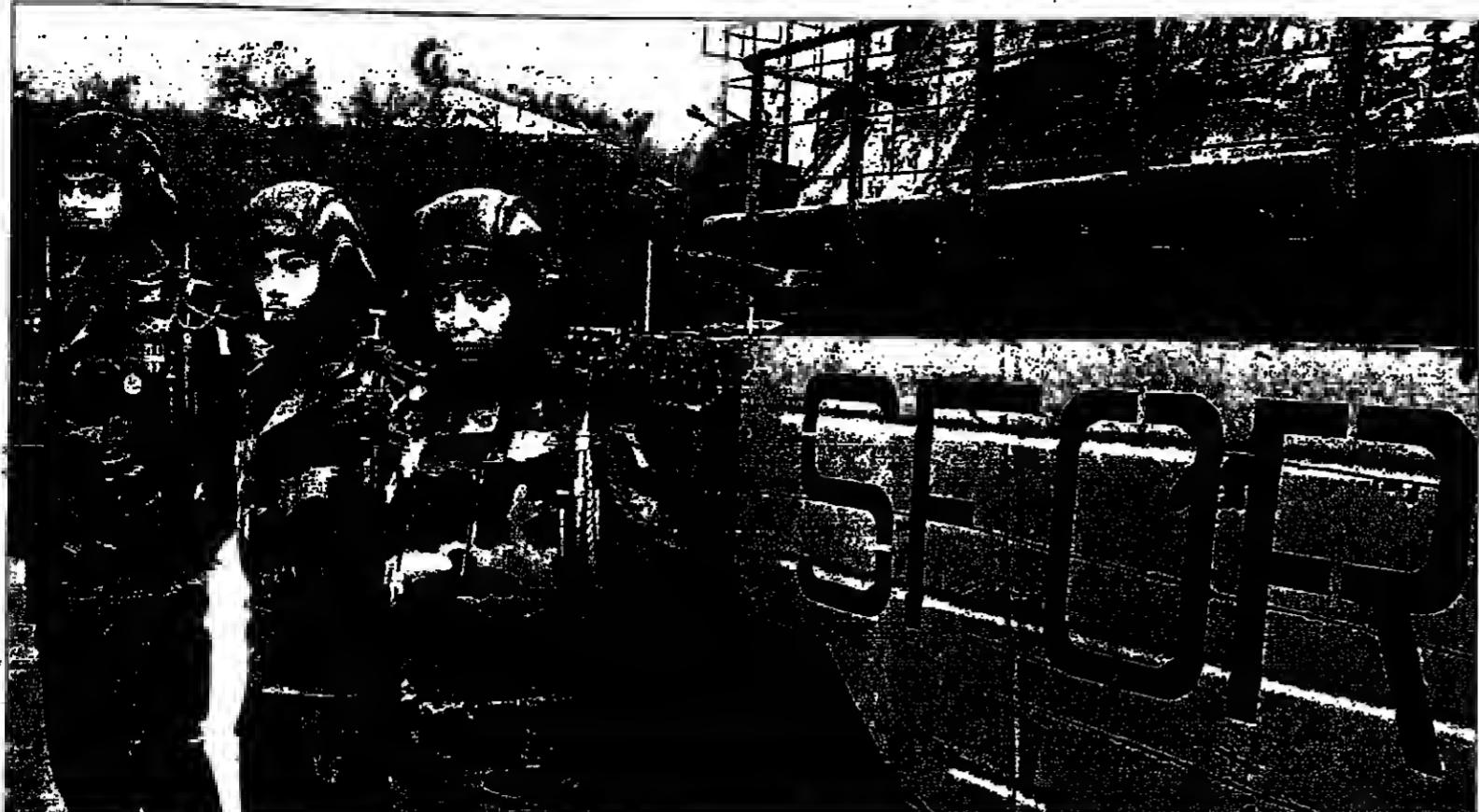
Rupert Cornwell
Washington

As a first wave of subpoenas hit the White House over possible campaign finance irregularities, new doubts surround Newt Gingrich's future as Speaker of the House, following the admission that he gave false evidence to a congressional committee investigating his political finances.

Through John Linder, a fellow Republican congressman from Georgia, Mr Gingrich has acknowledged that he gave wrong information to the House Ethics Committee, which for months has been investigating the allegedly improper use of tax-exempt money for a highly partisan college course taught by the Speaker until 1994. The row has already prompted the resignation of Mr Gingrich's ethics lawyer, who prepared the errant testimony, but insisted his client read and approved it.

However, the matter at issue is whether the development spells nothing but trouble for the harsh-spoken, fiercely ideologued Mr Gingrich whose waning popularity was one reason for the decline in the Republicans' majority in the House to only 20 in the new Congress which assembles next month, with the election of a Speaker one of its first tasks.

The odds remain, albeit narrowly, that Mr Gingrich will be reconfirmed as the first Republican to hold the post in 40 years, and the first to serve a second consecutive term since 1928. But even



Task force: French troops standing to attention at yesterday's ceremony marking the handover from I-For to S-For

Photograph: Reuters

New peace force to aid Bosnia's transition

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

In a brief ceremony yesterday morning, Nato's peace implementation force in Bosnia, I-For, became the stabilisation force - S-For.

Nato's supreme commander in Europe, General George Joulwan, and the commander of S-For, General William Crouch,

saluted as an I-For flag was hauled down at the headquarters at Ilidza, outside Sarajevo, and an S-For flag hoisted in its place, but that was the only visible change.

At its height, I-For had 58,000 troops. S-For is 31,000 strong, but will reduce in size over the next 18 months.

The structure of the new force is similar to I-For, with a

US commander, General Crouch, and a British deputy, Lieutenant-General Roderick Cordy-Simpson. British numbers in Bosnia are expected to decline from 6,000 to about 5,000 over the next few weeks.

The biggest change from I-For is the appearance of two German armoured infantry battalions. Previously, Germany has only provided support troops

in Croatia. The Americans continue to control the northern sector, based at Tuzla, with two Russian airborne battalions under their control. The presence of the Russians is very important to Nato, which sees it as one of the main levers to persuade the Russians to cooperate with the alliance on enlargement.

S-For will have no more authority to go in search of wanted

war criminals than I-For did. That is seen as the responsibility of the local forces.

S-For will concentrate on helping the process of civilian reconstruction, which still has a long way to go. Over the next 18 months the aim is to reduce the military presence and concentrate on reforming the police and encouraging freedom of movement.

Ed McCullagh
Associated Press

Lima — Handwritten messages pressed to windows of the Japanese ambassador's residence yesterday demanded food and water and that utilities be reconnected to the compound where 375 people were being held hostage.

"No Food, No Water. The Hostages" read one message in English. Posters written with felt pens in German, Japanese, Italian and Spanish made similar pleas. Another message, written in Japanese, said "We are fine, they are planning to release more hostages". It was not clear whether the hostages were making the demands on their own or under pressure of their captors.

The Red Cross, the main intermediary between the rebels and the government, was taking drinking water into the compound on Thursday, but it was not clear when the utilities had been turned off. Lights were seen blazing throughout the evening on Thursday.

Local media reported yesterday that Peru had tentatively decided not to meet rebel demands to free their jailed col-

leagues. Ecuador, which has hostile relations with neighbouring Peru, had said it would grant asylum in the rebels.

After a meeting on Thursday night, President Alberto Fujimori's Cabinet gave provisional approval to his proposal to reject the appeal to free any prisoners, radio and television reported.

Canadian Ambassador Anthony Vincent, who was among four hostages released in service as negotiators, was to meet with the rebels' chief Victor Polay last night, the Lima daily La Republica reported. The paper said the meeting was among the rebel demands. Polay, the principal founder of the Tupac Amaru rebel movement in the early 1980s, was captured in 1992 and is serving a life sentence at a navy base in Lima's port of Callao.

In Washington, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Peruvian authorities must maintain contact with the guerrillas holding the hostages.

Former UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, who was defeated by Fujimori in the 1995 elections, urged the government not to give in to the rebels' demands saying it would set a bad precedent. "It would encourage other terrorist groups, such as the Shining Path, to do the same," he said in an interview published in the daily El Comercio.

He noted such a demand for freedom could be made for Shining Path founder and leader Abimael Guzman, who is serving a life sentence without parole at the same prison as Polay.

The hostage crisis began

Tuesday night when two dozen

Tupac Amaru rebels seized

hundreds of guests at a party at the Japanese ambassador's house.

They have released nearly

300 hostages, mostly women,

but about 375 men still are be-

ing held, the Red Cross said.

The rebels' main demand

is been freedom for 300 of

their jailed comrades. They

also want transportation to a

central jungle, a commitment to

change the government's free-

market economic policy and the

payment of an unspecified "war

tax". On Wednesday, they

threatened to kill the hostages

one by one until the government

met their demands, but they let

that deadline pass with no

deaths and have not repeated

the threat since.

Harsh realities on the constitutional

MOSCOW DAYS

Every night, accompanied by the dog, I nip out for a stroll, and have a quick look round to see if my neighbours have violated the constitution. They always have, usually on a colossal scale. The ground glistens with a fresh layer of shattered glass.

Few Russians are aware that every time they lob an empty vodka bottle into the bushes, or toss a cigarette packet out of the car window, or throw a pot of rancid stew out of the window of their flat (a particular favourite round my way), they ought, legally speaking, to be in big trouble.

We are not talking here about a piffing city by-law. Article 58 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation clearly states that Russians are "obliged to preserve nature and the environment".

I raise the question because the constitution has been on everyone's mind here this past week. Or at least it ought to have been. Last weekend was cancelled: like the Monty Python parrot, it ceased to be. While Surrey was shopping and Sydney was surfing, Russians (at least officially) were struggling into their offices and factories for the start of a seven-day working week, reviving memories of the Stalin era when the Soviet citizenry would be made to slave away non-stop to fulfil his five-year plans.

Free speech withered on the vine around election time

To encourage them to vote. Confused? Of course you are. So were the Russians. Some turned up for work at the weekend; some did not. And everyone seems to have had a very vague idea of what it was that they were celebrating in the first place. Unlike Soviet times, not much happened; there were no grand parades of rockets and tanks through Red Square in front of the party bigwigs.

In fact, Thursday was Constitution Day, marking the adoption of the constitution in

1993. Taken literally, the document might be worth a small and cautious toast. But, in practice, it is little short of a joke, a document far more honoured in the breach than the observance. For example, it grants Russians the right to a jury trial, and to be considered innocent until proven guilty. Yet most defendants who appear in court find themselves peering through the bars of a cage at a judge and two lay assessors; juries are being experimented with, but only in nine of Russia's 89 republics or regions.

The constitution guarantees the right to free housing and a pension. Tell that to the thousands of people living on the streets, and the millions who have not received their pensions for months. Free speech is supposed to be protected, although it withered on the vine around election time, when the national media made sure that Mr Yeltsin's Communist-led rivals got about as much access to the airwaves as Sunt Fein during Britain's broadcasting ban.

One could go on. But perhaps that would be unreasonable. After all, this is a young country, where the rule of law, let alone a respect for it, has yet to be established. As the shattered glass, and my dog's cut paws, make so unpleasantly clear.

Phil Reeves

significant shorts

Nordic bikers convicted for fatal shoot-out

A Hell's Angel and two members of affiliated gangs were convicted yesterday for the shoot-out at Copenhagen international airport on 10 March, in which a member of the Bandidos gang was killed and 10 others were injured.

The jury convicted a second Hell's Angel, but the court reversed the decision, saying there was insufficient evidence and opening the possibility of a new trial. Two other bikers were also acquitted. AP - Copenhagen

Woman cleared of fratricide

A woman who grew up believing she had killed her baby brother when she was a toddler has been told by authorities re-examining the case that her stepfather killed the boy and framed her.

Jan Barry Sandin, 46, will face murder, aggravated assault and cruelty to children

charges for the death of four-month-old Matthew Golder, in 1971. Mr Sandlin is to be extradited from Florida, where he is in prison for armed robbery. Tracy Rhame suffered for 25 years that she had thrown her brother from his crib. AP - Georgia

Heart surgery for Marchais

Georges Marchais, former head of the French Communist Party, has undergone coronary bypass surgery. French state radio, France Info, has reported.

Mr Marchais, 76, was rushed into hospital on 11 December and briefly put in intensive care last week, party officials said. AP - Paris

Belgian steel workers riot

Hundreds of striking steel workers rioted in Tubize yesterday in protest over a European Union decision to block subsidies intended to rescue their ailing company. Workers from Forges de Clabecq steel mill were angry about the order to pay back 700m francs (£13m) subsidies from the Walloon regional government. AP - Brussels

Shanghai's new £43m library Shanghai yesterday opened its new library, the third largest in Asia after Peking and Tokyo. The library, which cost 600m yuan (£43m), houses 40 million books. Reuters - Shanghai

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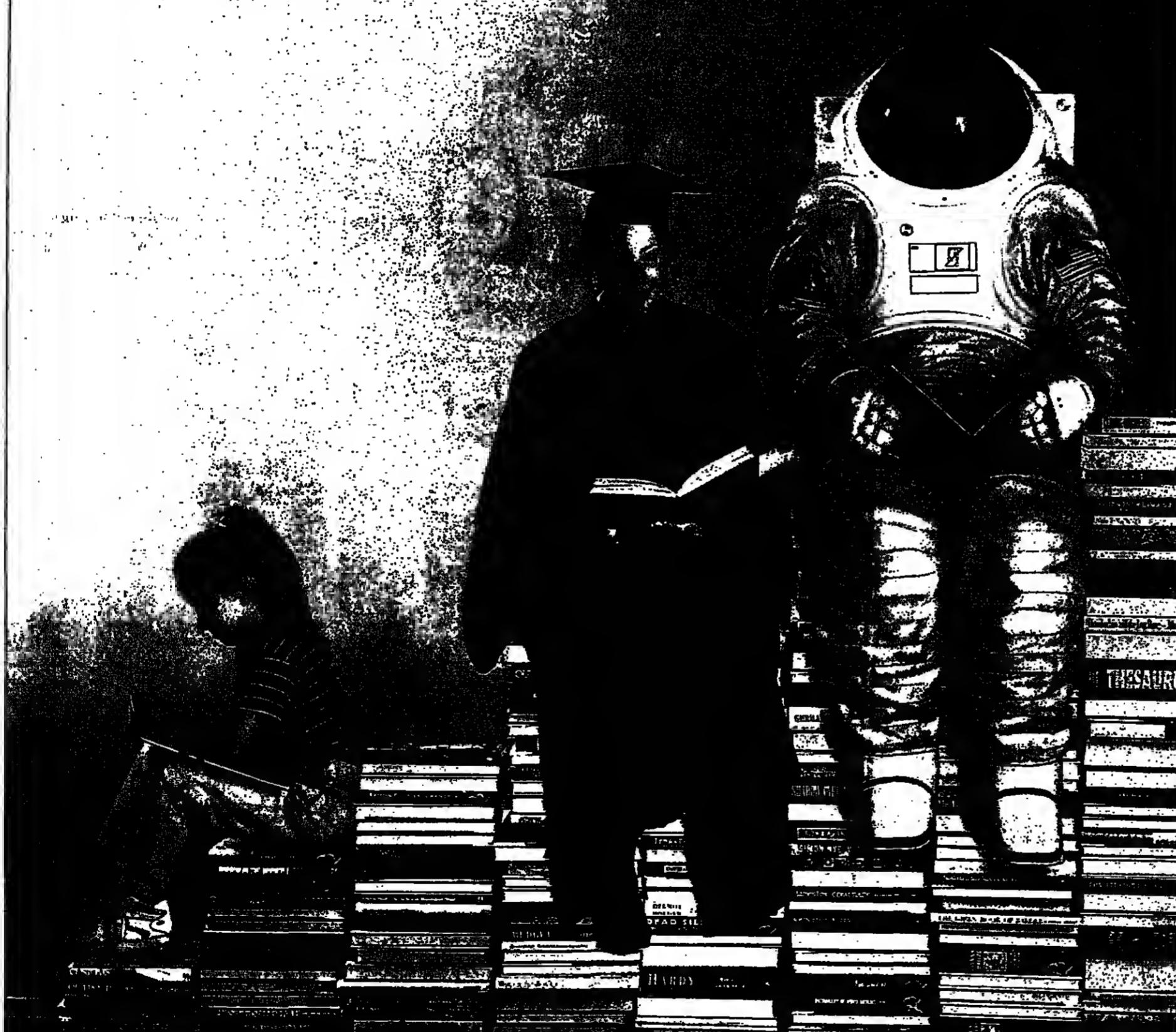
international



Festival of light: Christmas markets spring up in every town, offering Germans the chance to shop among the trinkets

Photograph: Sipa

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Germans live their dreams of Christmas past

Imre Karacs visits Nuremberg's chocolate-box world of medieval markets set up for the festive season

As if touched by pixie dust, German towns undergo a miraculous transformation this time of the year, sprouting pre-fab thatched cottages and ferris wheels in their midst, and enveloping themselves in the aromatic halo of mulled wine and the acrid smoke of sizzling Bratwurst. For a month, all social activities governed by the unremitting approach of the festive season begin and end here – at the Christmas market on the main square of every hamlet in the land.

They are not so much a retail outlet as a way of life. Other cultures may look upon their annual shopping faray as a chore, but to Germans Christmas offers the perfect excuse for a leisurely stroll down memory lane, into a chocolate-box world of fairy tales and good home cooking. You will find none of the pushing and shoving here that must be endured in the stores lining the adjacent streets. There is no early closing, and even on Sundays the market stays open. The tradition, dating back to the late Middle Ages, cutwaters more stringent laws which impose a deathly curfew on the high streets.

This would not be Germany if ranking did not play an important role in the Christmas market ethos. There is a rigid pecking order among towns, each vying for a slot in the national league that defines their relative quality of life. The biggest cities try to put on the biggest markets, thus failing miserably to recreate the charm and intimacy of their smaller competitors.

At the apex of the hierarchy stands Nuremberg, its "Christchild market" the grand-daddy of them all. Forget the Meistersinger and a couple of notable historical events in this century – Nuremberg derives its greatest fame among Germans from the huts that cover the cobble-stone square in front of the town hall in December. It is not the biggest, but it is the oldest, going back to 1559, and it boasts Germany's staple Christmas sweet, the Nürnberger Lebkuchen, which can only be bought and eaten during the festive season. For those of us addicted to this superior version of gingerbread, Christmass cannot come soon enough.

There are dozens of varieties of Lebkuchen on offer, at stalls run by Lebkuchen dynasties which guard their secret recipes and the family name as jealously as the great wine-makers of the Mosel. But that comes at the end of the tour. Visitors usually start at the kiosks selling a perplexing range of Wurst available in all shapes and sizes, from Nuremberg's celebrated small, spicy, variety, to the cucumber-shaped Kratauer catering for people with a higher tolerance for cholesterol. You can spend an afternoon crawling from sausage-stand to sausage-stand, alighting in between at stalls selling nothing but warm Glühwein. Then it is time for Lebkuchen, though perhaps not before a glass or three of sticky sweet liqueur.

Thus imbued with the spirit of the season, the hunt for presents can begin. This being an ancient market, the gifts on offer are timeless, made mostly from wholesome German wood. Pine as they might for Buzz Lightyear, the kids will be getting wooden Hansels and Gretels, or the little drummer boy in clay. Not one of dozens of stalls sells model train sets or – God forbid – computer games. There is wood everywhere, row upon row of brightly coloured, varnished figures dangling from pegs. For the grown-ups, there are gnomes and winged angels to adorn the garden, rocks and minerals for the mantelpiece, and books by the Grimm brothers for the shelves. Best-sellers, such as Daniel Goldhagen's infamous study of German war-time guilt, might just as well not exist.

The sound of the outside world wafts in occasionally, from the direction of the Belarusian fiddler in folk costume tormenting his instrument and innocent passers-by, and from the muffled ting-a-ling of "Jingle Bells" encased in a music box. Otherwise, one can almost imagine being back in 16th century Germany, standing somewhere near the spot where Hans Sachs, the greatest Meistersinger of all, cobbled his shoes together while practising his scales.

As a business venture, the market is a disaster. Margins on the trinkets are slim, and the vendors are complaining this year, as they have done for centuries, that the punters flock to their mock half-timbered bays to browse, not to part with their money. Yet despite their whingeing, the stall-holders will be back next year, and in the years to come, for as long as Germans will cling to the old-fashioned idea that there is more to Christmas than extravagant presents and fat profits.

Dismay over wilting of the Greens' ideals

Imre Karacs
Bonn

They were once the nice guys of German politics, wifing custodians of "flower power", wedded to radical ideas about saving the planet. Now they stand accused by their own disaffected members of the heinous crime of pursuing "pure power politics".

The charge was levelled against the Greens by their MP, Vera Lengsfeld, who defected to the Christian Democrats this week in disgust. She said the Greens were preparing to strike a Faustian pact with the post-Communists of eastern Germany, a move which she, a former East German dissident, found repugnant.

It is a testament to the enduring legacy of their idealism that some Greens should be surprised by their party's single-minded attempt to enter government. But in truth, Petra Kelly's heirs long ago abandoned any pretence of trying to change the world from the outside and have inevitably been corrupted by the morsels of power picked up along the journey.

The goal of "zero growth" – economic stagnation for the sake of the environment – is but a distant memory; pacifism a hollow slogan. What remains of the original dream is the "four wheels bad, two wheels good" mantra, hostility to nuclear power, and the pledge to impose an "environmental tax" on fuel. Even these are subject to negotiation, however.

Of all the Greens' recent metamorphoses, their changing relationship with industry is the most striking. The party's avowed aim is to form the government with the Social Democrats after the next elections scheduled for 1998, a goal por-



Unfaithful followers: Petra Kelly's heirs want power

trayed by the current administration as a recipe for mass unemployment and recession. Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats have put out posters depicting factory machines covered in cobwebs, brought to a halt by a double-whammy of wage-inflating Reds and Ludite Greens. To improve their image among blue-collar workers, the Greens have lately been courting the trade unions.

So now it's onwards and upwards for the left? Not quite. Their problem remains that the sum total of votes cast for a Red-Green alliance is less than the two parties would score if they were not shackled by the other. According to a poll published this week, the Greens would get about 14 per cent – twice what they gained in the last elections in 1994 – while the Social Democrats would be supported by 35 per cent of the voters.

That would be enough to oust Mr Kohl, but real elections have shown that many Social Democrats are prepared to vote against their own party if that is what it takes to keep the environmentalists out of government.

Stars to net billions in copyright deal

Matthew Horsman
Media Editor

Tired but jubilant officials of 160 nations yesterday agreed two far-reaching treaties on copyright for the digital age, clearing the way for artists, writers and recording companies to earn billions of pounds a year through their work on the Internet.

The two treaties – on literary and artistic work and on the rights of performers and pro-

ducers – mark the first time the international community has agreed terms to protect copyright for digitally transmitted material.

The "cyberspace copyright" agreement, subject to the approval of national governments, was seen as the biggest advance in copyright law since the Berne Convention on publications, agreed last century.

For the first time, recording artists will be protected when their material distributed

digitally, Jukka Liedes, the Finnish chairman of the talks, said. The protection is seen as necessary given that digital transmission allows for perfect copying.

"Madonna will now have the possibility for the first time to make her works available on the Internet and have her rights respected in the digital environment," he said. The recording industry believes the market for music on the Internet could be worth \$2bn (£1.25bn) a year

EMI of Britain expressed satisfaction at the outcome of three weeks of exhausting negotiations, under the sponsorship of the United Nations. "This is an excellent result," a spokesman said. "We have long wanted protection in the digital age. The treaties were crucial."

Other so-called "rights holders" – ranging from publishers to musicians to software writers – were also pleased, pointing out that a new market could now develop for "pay-as-you go"

entertainment, delivered to the home by computer.

A third treaty, which had been drafted to cover databases, was dropped when it became clear no consensus could be reached.

Several negotiators said the proposals would have seen copyright protection extended to facts, and not just expression – marking a radical and undesirable shift in copyright law. Had the third treaty been passed, they argued, databases

such as soccer league statistics and stock prices would have been included.

Negotiators also dropped a controversial draft section that would have made online Internet service providers responsible for copyright violations even when computer users merely "surfed" the Internet. Surfing requires the transitory copying of information, even if the user does not, in the end, seek access to it.

The talks had been forced to a conclusion by the setting of

yesterday's deadline. The 800 delegates will now return home, as the long process of national ratification begins.

■ A senior Iranian cleric called for restricting Internet access. "It should be limited to research and scientific centres," Ayatollah Ahmad Janati said in a sermon at Tehran University. "Beyond that, it is poison fed to people." Iran's 10,000-plus subscribers must already pledge not to access "un-Islamic" information.

'Black' English gains California credence

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

In what some hail as an overdue move to help African-American students, but which others denounce as political correctness run amok, a Californian city is for the first time to recognise "black English" as a separate language, and seek bilingual educational help for students who speak it.

The benchmark decision by the school board of Oakland, near San Francisco, is aimed at enabling black students to make the transition in a "culturally sensitive" way to standard English.

In effect, the recommendation acknowledges black English – or "Ebonics" – as being linked to a separate culture. Some say its syntax can be traced back to Africa; peculiarities include unusual forms of the verb "to be", and idiosyncratic use of "gone" and "done" as auxiliary verbs.

Defenders of the scheme say that pilot projects involving 100 Oakland teachers have produced big improvements in language skills among African American students. But its foes insist it will only make a bad situation worse.

"The idea of treating little black kids as bilingual is an abomination," Professor John McWhorter of Berkeley University told the *Oakland Tribune*. "I say that as a black linguist. This is political correctness gone awry."

Robot man or just a doting dad? Will the real Alain Juppé stand up?

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

The most hated man in France? The most unpopular prime minister since Edith Cresson? A lean and hungry politician of such cold efficiency as to merit the nickname "the walkingбота"?

This is Alain Juppé – the Relaunch, as brought to disgruntled voters this Christmas courtesy of the magazine *Paris-Match*, the publisher, Nil, and of course Mr Juppé, who, it appears, has finally understood that he has a communication problem.

From remote, compulsive technocrat, he has turned himself into a shy but blissfully happy family man whose single purpose as prime minister is to improve life for the French, and

only that he has so little time for reading and perhaps a little writing. He dreams of 1998, when, with the Gaullists victorious in the parliamentary elections, he can holiday in Ireland for a spot of fishing or, on reflection, in the Greek islands that have been his paradise since his youth.

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Juppé and Hyde: The Prime Minister, who has had a course of *Hello!*-type treatment to make him more amenable to the disillusioned French public

especially the next generation.

The seven-page *Paris-Match* feature, which appeared yesterday, shows Mr Juppé in many unaccustomed guises. As well as in the nursery, photographs depict him en famille beside the Christmas tree, in his office with Clara (one hand in his daughter's, one on his papers and pens), and depositing a kiss on his wife's hand during the soup course at a Bordeaux restaurant.

In the accompanying interview, he (and *Paris-Match*) go out of their way to present him

as the opposite of his public image.

Heartless technocrat from the élite? "I was very unhappy at ENA [the elite school for administrators]... I came from a very modest background." A computer brain?

He had a teacher who kept telling him how intelligent he was but he veered towards the arts and classics, not to maths and science, and was no good at philosophy.

Arrogant and thoughtless? Well, maybe, but only by mistake. He admits that describing

the giant state firm Thomson as worth "only one franc" and the civil service as having "plenty of fat on it" were damaging public-relations gaffes.

But, in a passage of vintage Juppé, he also asks whether "communication skills" would solve everything.

"When you have to do something unpleasant and difficult, you can apply as many communications skills as you want, but people will still find it difficult to accept. It's far harder to accept a rise in VAT than a fall, however well you communicate it."

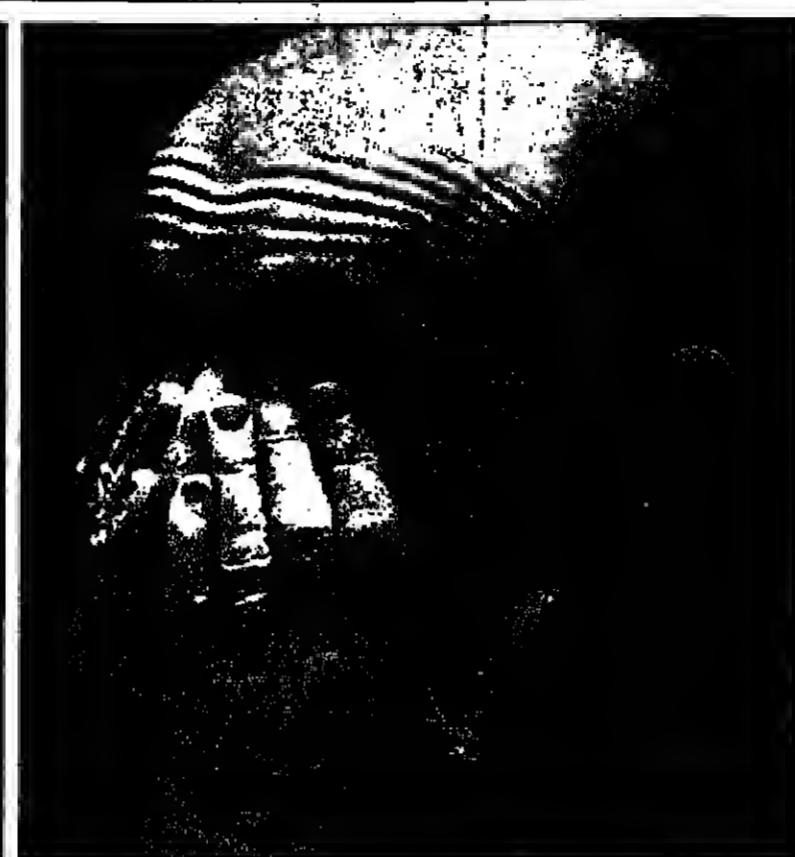
The previous day, the giant publishing house, the reliable establishment recommended, Mr Juppé says, by his friend, President Jacques Chirac, released his slim volume of intimate self-justification, *Between Ourselves*. It is in a similar vein to the *Paris-Match* interview, but with considerably more politics.

The dedication, for instance, is not, as might have been expected from the *Paris-Match* performance, to his wife and daughter, nor yet to the next year's industrial unrest, seems to be over, and Mr Juppé's poll ratings had finally edged up a fraction.

"quality and strength of their commitment at my side". The message is: "Anyone who says the team is weak and divided and I'm not a team player could not be further from the truth."

Paradoxically, Juppé Mark II appears just as the French seem to have grudgingly reconciled themselves to Juppé Mark I. Mr Chirac has twice recently given his prime minister

support, the worst of the year's industrial unrest seems to be over, and Mr Juppé's poll ratings had finally edged up a fraction.



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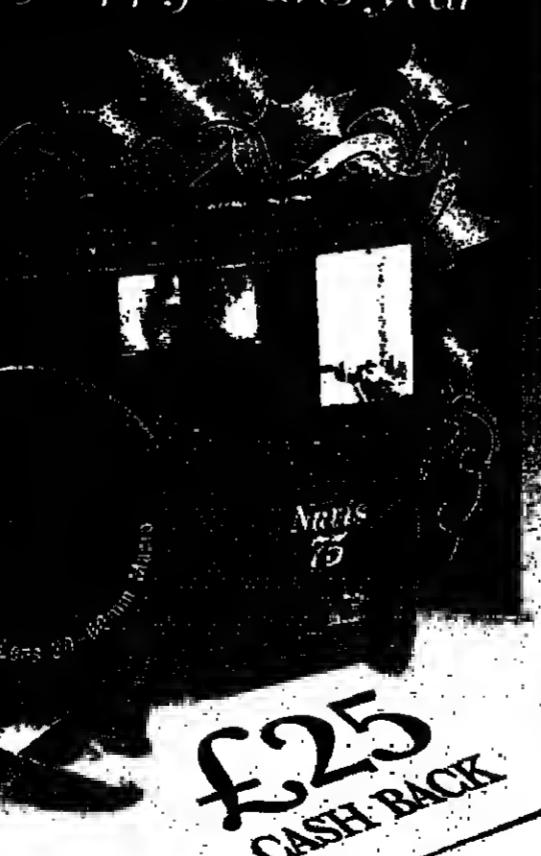
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obituaries / gazette

Professor Carl Sagan

In 1994, Carl Sagan was presented with the Public Welfare Medal, the highest award of the US National Academy of Sciences. The citation rightly claimed that "No one has ever succeeded in conveying the wonder, excitement and joy of science as widely as Carl Sagan and few as well". Such skills are rare in any individual, yet Sagan was also a professional astronomer who carried out important research in planetary science—inspiring millions with his writings and broadcasts was just one of his many talents.

Carl Sagan had already dedicated himself to an astronomer by the age of 13. Having told his grandfather of his choice of career, the response was "Yes, yes, but how will you make your living?" Sagan once said that one of the greatest moments of his life was when he was told by his high school biology teacher that there were people who were actually paid to do astronomy.

So naturally inspired he went on to obtain his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1960 and taught at the University of California at Berkeley, Harvard and the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory before taking a position at Cornell in 1968.

A recurring theme in his research was the origin of life. Following on from the laboratory experiments of Stanley Miller and Harold Urey, Sagan and his colleagues showed that it was relatively easy to produce amino acids—the building blocks of life, by exposing mixtures of methane, ammonia, water and hydrogen sulphide to long-wavelength ultraviolet light.

This work continued under Sagan's directorship of the Laboratory of Planetary Studies at Cornell. He also worked on studies of the surface of Mars

and Venus, and he was an active participant in the highly successful Mariner, Viking and Voyager missions which sent robot spacecraft to explore the planets. In 1976 Sagan was appointed David Duncan Professor of Astronomy and Space Sciences, and from 1988 to 1979 he was Editor-in-Chief of *Icarus*, the International Journal of Solar System Studies. Sagan remained at Cornell for the rest of his life and his presence there enhanced the university's reputation as one of the leading centres for planetary research in the world.

A vociferous proponent of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (Seti), an experiment originally funded by Nasa to locate radio signals from other civilisations in outer space, Sagan investigated the practicalities of conveying information about ourselves to other intelligent beings. In 1977, he became the driving force behind a project to prepare a disk of recorded material for attachment to each of the two Voyager spacecraft due to reach interstellar space following their exploration of the outer solar system.

The project, detailed in the book *Murmers of Earth* (1978), provided an opportunity to convey the essence of our own civilisation to others. As well as 118 photographs and greetings in almost 60 languages, the disk contained 90 minutes of music selected from around the world encompassing many cultures and traditions ("I would send the complete works of Johann Sebastian Bach," remarked a biologist, "but that would be boasting".)

In 1978 Sagan won a Pulitzer Prize for his book *The Dragons of Eden: speculations on the evolution of human intelligence*.

Sagan made frequent television appearances and with his slow, deliberate voice of reason, he became an articulate spokesman for astronomy and science, often espousing the cause of rational scientific argument and debate in the face of a tide of pseudo-science and superstition. He returned to this theme in his final book, *Demons Haunted World* (1996). He believed that all scientists should be capable of describing their work in terms that were understandable to the general public and furthermore that they had a duty to do so.

Ironically, something he had in common with many professional scientists who undertake to make complex concepts more accessible to the public, his ability to popularise his own subject led some astronomers to doubt his credentials as a working scientist. However, even though the publicity resulting from *Cosmos* made it difficult for him to return to his normal duties at Cornell, he continued to produce important contributions to planetary science on a wide range of subjects.

One of his most influential papers (with Richard Turrin, Owen Toon, Thomas Ackerman and James Pollack – the Trap group) introduced the concept of nuclear winter, whereby the fires resulting from a thermonuclear war would inject fine smoke particles into the

Earth's atmosphere, trigger a global ice age and cause the collapse of agriculture; there could be no winner of such a war.

With supporting evidence from the dust storms on Mars and the subsequent verification of the concept using computer models, Sagan speculated that perhaps the prospect of nuclear winter had played a constructive role in convincing nations of the futility of nuclear war.

Sagan was fond of pointing out that we are living at a unique point in our history when, in the course of a few generations, humans have taken the first steps beyond their home planet to explore the solar system. He delighted in the

potentialities of space, how perilous our journeys, how humble our beginnings, how many rivers we had to cross before we found our way.

If we do manage to find our way, it will be thanks to the efforts of Carl Sagan. The inhabitants of the blue dot mourn his departure.

Carl Murray

Carl Sagan, astronomer and writer; born Brooklyn, New York 9 November 1934; David Duncan Professor of Astronomy and Space Science, Cornell University 1976-96; married first Lynn Margulis, second Linda Salzman (three sons), third 1981 Ann Druyan (one son, one daughter); died Seattle 20 December 1996

The slow, deliberate voice of reason: Sagan's 13-part television series on astronomy, *Cosmos* (1980), is estimated to have been seen by almost 1.0 per cent of the world's population

Photograph: AP

Other books include *Broca's Brain* (1985) and *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1993), these last two with his third wife, Ann Druyan, as co-author. He also wrote a novel, *Contact* (1985). However, to the general public he will be best-remembered for *Cosmos* (1980), an ambitious book and 13-part television series on astronomy which highlighted the efforts of those people throughout history who have tried to make sense of the universe. It is estimated that the series has been seen by almost 10 per cent of the world's population and it justifiably earned Sagan many accolades and awards.

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Konrad Fischer

Konrad Fischer was one of the most innovative and influential art dealers of his generation.

Born in Düsseldorf in 1939, he attended the Düsseldorf Art Academy from 1953 to 1962. In 1963, exhibiting under his mother's maiden name of Lueg, he collaborated with his fellow students Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter to found a new movement, "Capitalist Realism", a European strain of Pop Art and an ironic reflection of the material world of the nascent German economic miracle.

Richter and Richter went on to develop international reputations as conceptual painters, Fischer, with his feeling for art and artists, became no less influential, but as an agent for artists. It was the legendary dealer and representative of Joseph Beuys, Alfred Schmela, who having shown Lueg's work in 1963 encouraged him to start a second gallery for young people.

This joint project did not work out, but in 1967 Fischer developed his own concept for a gallery. His idea was startling in its simplicity but established a completely new approach to exhibiting contemporary art, not only in other galleries, but also in exhibition halls and museums across Europe and eventually America.

Carl Andre, the first artist to

show at Konrad Fischer's gallery, in October 1967, has written of the experience:

Konrad did not have enough money to pay for the shipping and insurance of any art work so he sent me the cheapest New York/Düsseldorf Luftthansa ticket. [He also] did not have enough money to rent a proper studio, so I used a disused alley that ran like a tunnel through a tenement block in the Altstadt, blocked both ends with glass doors, and wired fluorescent lights from end to end overhead. When I arrived he handed me a brush and a can of paint and said "Carl, the sooner you paint the floor, the sooner can I install your work."

Andre tore up the plans that he had made in New York and proceeded to make a new work devised specially for the scale and configuration of Fischer's gallery. This principle of moving the artist, rather than the work of art, reflected a contemporary interest in concept as much as object and was soon widely adopted as a model, as was Fischer's custom of announcing his exhibitions by means of a simple postcard.

Fischer followed Andre's exhibition with the first European exhibitions for the American Richard Artschwager, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman and Robert Ryman, and the first one-person exhibitions anywhere for Hanne Darboven, On Kawara and the British artist Rich-

ard Long, Hamish Fulton, Bruce McLean and Gilbert and George.

Within the space of two years

Fischer's gallery became one of the two or three most important places to see new developments in contemporary art. It provided a forcing ground for the artists and the ideas that dominated the avant-garde agenda and the international exhibitions of the period, including "When Attitudes Become Form" in Bern in 1968, the annual series of "Prospect" exhibitions held in Düsseldorf from 1968 and culminating in Harald Szeemann's "Documents 5" at Kassel in 1972.

In the 1970s Fischer became

the most influential figure in a group of European galleries that included Wide White Space in Antwerp, Art and Space in Amsterdam, Heiner Friedrich in Munich and the Lisson Gallery in London, continuing to show minimal and conceptual art and the work of the Italian Arte Povera artists such as Mario Merz and Jannis Kounellis. But his influence grew from his close association with artists and the significance of the particular exhibitions that they made in his gallery rather than through his success as a merchant.

Fischer's primary goal was

not to act as a salesman but, as

he put it, "to keep the family informed". Andre's account discloses Fischer's instinctive sympathy for the mind and the strategy of the artist. This was repaid by the loyalty which artists displayed when they came under pressure to show in more successful commercial galleries in the late Seventies and early Eighties.

Time and again artists would

reserve their best work or efforts for a show at Fischer's, from where the work would be bought by discerning collectors or other dealers who would subsequently present it in their own "general stores", as Fischer described those commercial galleries with no sense of dedication to a group or a generation.

In the mid-Eighties Fischer

renewed his commitment to

emerging artists, embracing

a younger generation of sculptors, including Schütte, Mucha, and Klinghoffer from Düsseldorf, as well as Tony Cragg and Juan Munoz.

For 30 years Fischer was a

presence at every important

exhibition opening in the Eu-

ropean art world. Understated

and relaxed in contrast to his

older competitors, he could be

seen in the bar in the company

of artists or a small group of de-

cimating collectors from Ger-

many, Holland and the Rhine-

land rather than drinking chal-

lange with the international

collectors who emerged in the

Eighties and Nineties.

Konrad Fischer was shrewd

and self-deprecating with an

ironic sense of humour. He

had a special relationship with

British art and regularly showed

the work of Hans Haacke and

Alan Charlton as well as Richard

Long, Gilbert and George and

Tony Cragg. Dorothy, his wife

and then his working partner for

nearly 30 years, continues to run

the gallery in Düsseldorf, a role

which became even more sig-

nificant as Fischer fought the

battle which brought his early

death.

Nicholas Serota

If art dealers have always been fascinating, that delicious combination of large sums of money and larger cultural erudition, in the 20th century they are nigh totemic figures, writes Adrian Dantzig. The more hermetic or enigmatic art becomes the more crucial the gallerist.

Konrad Fischer was the ideal modern dealer, absolutely uncompromising in his tastes, completely committed to abstract art, rather than anecdotal pseudo-biography or associative glamour, just as importantly, awfully good at selling.

Konrad Fischer made you

feel you should stick to your

guns and carry on with what you

wanted to do; it wasn't about

money, it was about art. Fischer

was totally independent, totally

about the art. He focused on

the art and the artists and

couldn't give a rat's ass about

the public.

Konrad Fischer, artist and art

dealer; born Düsseldorf 1939;

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With his gallery in Düsseldorf for nearly 30 years, Fischer was amongst the handful of figures who made post-war Germany a universally envied haven for contemporary art, responsible for a generation of enlightened collectors, generous museums and local *Kunsthauses*.

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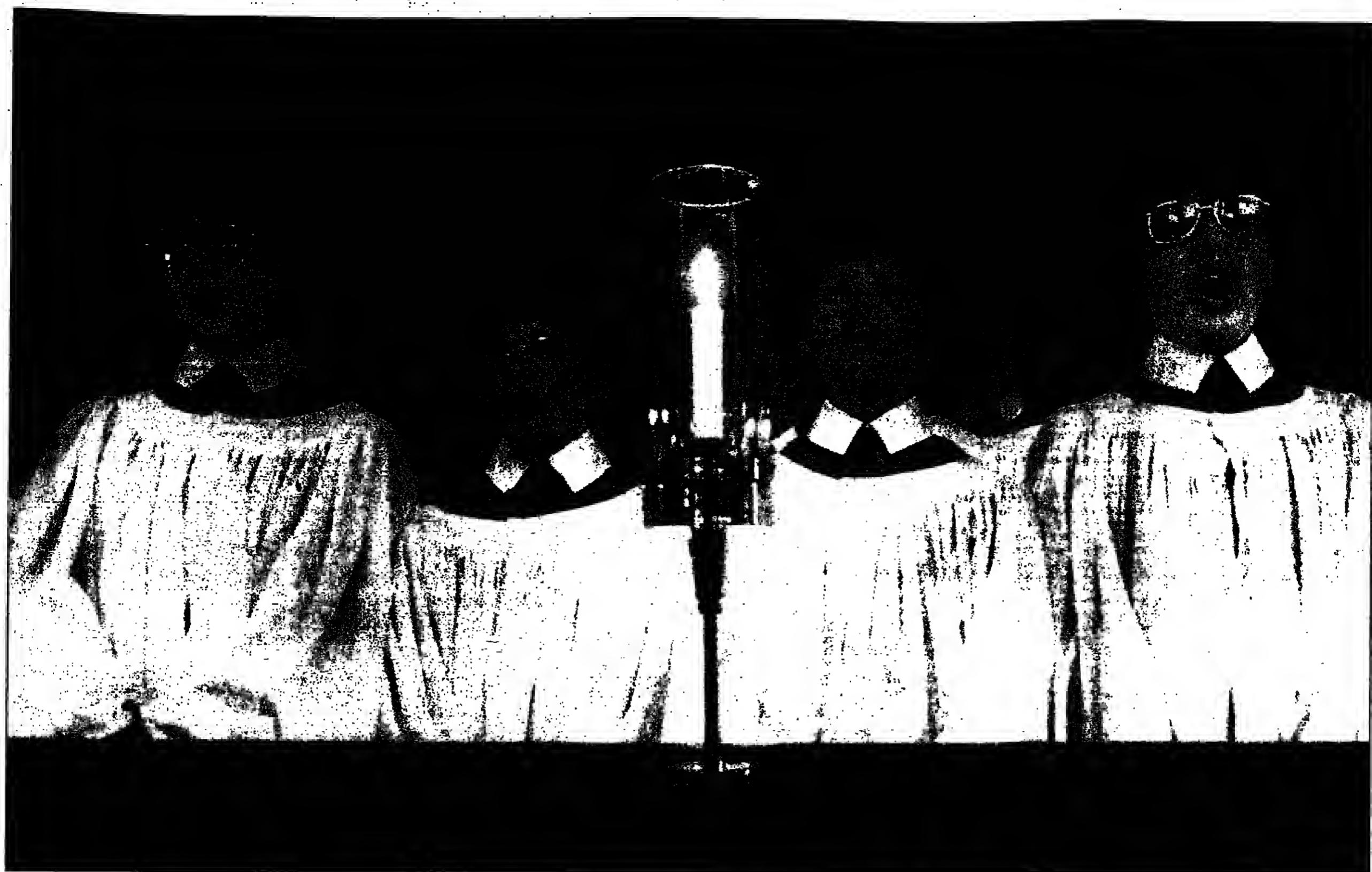
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Oh sing all ye faithful: Choristers of King's College choir, Cambridge, rehearse for their annual broadcast of carols. Photograph by David Rose. Taken with Fuji ASA at 1/8th second F2 with 35mm lens on a Leica M6

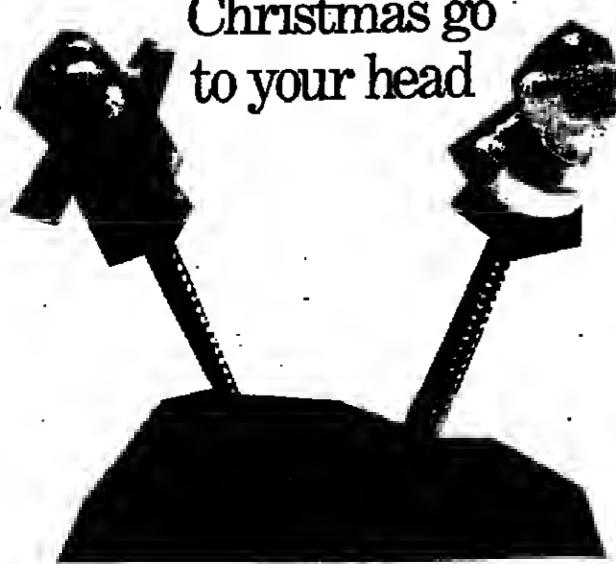


the long weekend

THE INDEPENDENT • SATURDAY 21 DECEMBER 1996

Few events conjure up the spirit of Christmas more poignantly than the festival of carols performed by the choir of King's College, Cambridge. Nothing captures that event more movingly than the still, small, voice of the soloist who leads with 'Once in Royal David's City'. Still, small, voices are in short supply in the holiday hurly-burly. You could escape it all skiing across the empty wastes of Lapland but if you have to join the fray, check our last-minute gift list. And if you're feeling extrovert, put on one of these daft Santas and let

Christmas go to your head



interview



John Walsh meets... Posy Simmonds

So precise and neat, the cartoonist and social satirist of the Eighties is also sophisticated and sexy. **page 3**

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Chess, bridge 2
Crossword 2
Arts notebook 3

arts & books



X marks the plot. Or does it?

Why it is the letter which signals both a sense of aching desire and one of howling panic **page 4**

Clint uncovered 4
Byzantium's legacy 5
A week in books 5
Arts 6

travel



The tears of a Scrooge on skis

Cold, gloomy, dark, but Steve Wood found winter in Lapland awesome and utterly moving **page 7**

Quiz 8
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shopping



Don't panic! Try treats for under a tenner

Be chic on the cheap. Buy last-minute pressies. Try Louise Levene's last ditch face-savers **page 16**

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Weather 23

4 extra pages to get you through the holiday



Walking, watching,
praying and playing
PAGES 11 - 14



A millennium of ninety-sixes

With the help of Joseph Strutt's 'Sports and Pastimes of the People of England', William Hartston summons up the games of Christmas past

"It is said of the English," Strutt reports in his book of 1876, "that formerly they were remarkable for the manner in which they celebrated the festival of Christmas; at which season they admitted variety of sports and pastimes not known, or little practised, in other countries."

In the royal court, a "lord of misrule" was appointed over the Christmas period, who job was to supervise the general merriment and provide games and amusements to keep everyone jolly.

Both Lincoln's Inn and the city of Norwich used to appoint a King of Christmas to supervise the revels, while the universities of Oxford and Cambridge would elect a "King of the Bean" by baking a single bean into a cake, and seeing who had the lucky slice.

The games that follow, all taken from Strutt's book, are not specifically Christmassy, but may well have been played in the eras referred to.



Christmas 1196: "The subjoined engraving represents two boys seated upon a form by the side of a water-tub; both of them with their hands fixed below their knees, and one bending backwards in the same position, intending, I presume, to touch the water without emerging his head or falling into it, and afterwards to recover his position." Strutt has no idea what the second boy does. He conjectures it's the same as the other boy. "If it be necessary for him who stoops to take anything out of the water, the pastime will bear some analogy to the diving for apples represented on a previous page."

For a modern version of this game, without the danger of getting wet, try this: First, kneel on the ground. Then place one elbow on the ground, touching the corresponding knee. Extend the forearm until as far as possible in front of you, without breaking contact between elbow and knee. Then place one elbow on the ground, touching the corresponding knee. Extend the forearm until as far as possible in front of you, without breaking contact between elbow and knee. Now without shifting your kneeling posture, clasp your hands behind your back. Finally, lean forwards and try to pick up the matchbox with your mouth. This, in the present

writer's experience, is one of the most reliable ways to tell whether someone is male or female. Women can do it; men topple over. It's something to do with centres of gravity and bone lengths.

Christmas 1296: "Cross and pile is a silly pastime well enough known among the lowest and most vulgar classes of the community, and to whom it is at present very properly confined; formerly, however, it held a higher rank and was introduced at the court. Edward II was partial to this and such like frivolous diversions, and spent much of his time in pursuit of them."

A halfpenny is generally now used in playing this game, but any other coin with a head impressed on one side will answer the purpose, the reverse of the head being called the tail without respect to the figure upon it. Anciently the English coins were stamped on one side with a cross. One person tosses the halfpenny up and the other calls at pleasure head or tail; if his call lies uppermost when the halfpenny descends and rests upon the ground, he wins; and if on the contrary, of course he loses."

Christmas 1396: "A man seated holds up one of his feet, opposed to the foot of another man, who standing upon one leg endeavours to touch the water with his foot. In another variant given by Strutt, the hopping man is replaced by one seated in a swing and swung towards the other: '... the man of course descended with great force, and striking the foot of his antagonist with much violence, no doubt very frequently overthrew him.'

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Christmas 1396: Cayles, Closch and Loggats are all predecessors of ninepins. Cayles was played with a bat, ball and various numbers of pins, which the batsman tried to knock over with his stroke of the ball. Closch was similar, only with the ball thrown directly at the pins, and Loggats was another version, using bones instead of pins. Whence Hamlet's: "Did these bones cost no

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Christmas 1496: "Hot Cockles, from the French *hautes coquilles*, is a play in which one kneels, and covering his eyes lays his head in another's lap and guesses who struck him." The game is mentioned by John Gay, who wrote:

As at Hot Cockles once I laid me down/And felt the weighty hand of many a clown,/Buxoma gave a gentle tap, and Quick rose, and read soft mischief in her eye.

Strutt points out that Hot Cockles is not at all the same as the ancient Greek game of Chytrinda, which "is similar to another equally well known to us, and called frog in the middle". "A single player, called *xorpa*, *kotra*, and with us the frog, being seated upon the ground, was surrounded by his comrades, who pulled and buffeted him until he could catch one of them; which done, the person caught took his place, and was buffeted in like manner."

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Beauty in the detail

If you're wondering what to buy Posy Simmonds for Christmas, let me help. She would simply love a new magnifying glass, one of the large, rectangular ones that she clamps to the side of her desk in order to see more clearly the tiny filigree bits, the curlicues and incidental details, the fingernails and cake crumbs and whiskers of her legendary cartoon characters. The lady herself is a kind of miniature – not that she's particularly small, but that she's an embodiment of tiny precision, of neatness and fastidious exactness. She talks with animation, but her voice gets smaller and smaller during her sentences and dwindles away before the end, as though mortified by its initial boldness. Her slender fingers twitch and twiddle in the air as if adjusting minute whiskers. She uses the word "weeny" to describe the "shoebox" in Holborn where she used to live before moving to the vast north London mansion she now inhabits with her husband, Richard Hollis. It features an enormous front door, like the main portal of Gormenghast, vast windows with black shutters, a spectacular knock-through living room full of Japanese prints, French portraits, expensive porcelain and ancient brocade upholstery, all of which looming antiquity and grandeur only makes this modern and demure woman seem even more *mignon* than ever.

She is also exceptionally good company. At different times during our chat, she impersonated a hen, a field of sheep and a creaking door for me, told jokes, swore like a Harwich docker and wound up a clockwork ferret which chased a plastic ball under one of the empire Gothic armchairs. She would come across as the perfect aunt, were she not so beautiful.

We talked about Christmas shopping. "I find a lot of the shops are changing. Lots of the supposedly smart ones are suddenly all dressed concrete walls. Everything's got very stripped down, clothes included. Petticoats, for instance – they're all the same sludge colour. The colour of elephant's breath." She is equally scathing about the range of smells on offer in the cosmetic department: "Those terrible square blocks of soap which smell of tarmac and seaweed. Of course,



John Walsh meets...
Posy
Simmonds

turer forever wrestling with semiotic conundrum among the unheeding suburbs, and his wife Wendy, droopy, moth-eaten but heroic nonetheless, drew a fanatically loyal readership. Posy fans read about the Webers' six children, from the streaming-nosed toddler, Benji, to the eldest daughter, Belinda, a kohl-drenched leather queen with unsuitably violent boyfriends. They warmed to Stanhope Wright, advertising man and chronic adulterer; to Edmund Heep, the bar-room vulgarian with his lexicon of euphemisms for visiting the lavatory; to Stanhope's piss-taking fat daughter Jocasta, to Edmund's sons' post-punk hand, The Snotty Throttlers...

But she gave it up in 1987, reasoning that the days of the woolly, lentil-swilling liberal were as numbered as those of the woolly mammoth amid all the go-getting yuppie-dom of the late Eighties. The Webers turned up in subsequent books (the last was *Musn't Grumble* in 1993) but Posy Simmonds directed her talents more and more into writing children's books: *Fred* (in which two children discover that their dead cat used to be a legendary pop star), *Lulu and the Flying Babies* (the cherubs in a renaissance painting give a little girl a guided tour of the world of art), *The Chocolate Wedding* (an

Fred's other life. I knew Kenneth would be right because he has these neat little fingers [she briefly wiggled her own] for sewing on Fred's sequins. I imagined him having a treadmill in his hutch, instead of a wheel. They're always busy, aren't they, guinea pigs?'

Posy's interest in getting a small rodent absolutely right is wholly characteristic. She is a perfectionist who admires the quality in other artists, whether they're screen animators ("I went to see them doing *Fred* over the summer. All these computer screens with just one tiny action, one nanosecond of film, being drawn with this minute detail. With my pencil and rubber, I felt quite *Stone Age*") to Nick Park, creator of Wallace and Gromit. "He's the first animator who's really done mouths properly, got the lips and teeth absolutely right. Maybe being three-dimensional helps."

You can see it pain her that the main audience for her books, namely children, display such limited imaginative horizons when they meet her. "Usually they want me to draw them things from Super Nintendo games," she says crossly. "Or they'll say, 'Did you do *Toy Story*?'" – "No" – "Can you draw Buzz Lightyear?" – "Sorry, no" – and they assume I'm hopeless." A familiar scenario, apparently, is the gushing parent who brings the mutinous child to meet Posy, proffers one of her books and says, "Look darling, this is the lady who did *The Chocolate Wedding*" – at which the child looks suspiciously at the book and, as though humouring a sad fantasist, asks kindly, "And which hit did you do?"

Little do they know. Behind the whispering sophisticate lurks a woman of strange powers. For one thing she is ambidextrous, but her left hand writes backwards. I mean it: Ms Simmonds writes fluent mirror writing. I asked her to demonstrate, and she wrote:

"bərə iñ amar ym olleH"

in a single flourish. "It's because I do a lot with this hand [the left] but I'm very right-handed as well. The left is the one that goes automatically to do things, but the right has become the one I draw with. But then the left is much better at sharpening pencils and cutting things out. And serving tennis balls." Sadly, the ambidextrous facility is not just a useless gift, it means she can't drive a car. "Because I can't distinguish left from right. My sense of direction is OK, but if I were approaching a roundabout, and there was nothing in front of me turning off, I wouldn't naturally go left. I'd somehow see the traffic from a different perspective at the same time."

What else could she do? Cast runes? Sing in a voice that shatters glass? Sex chickens? "Oh I can do chickens," she said, with the demure matter-of-factness of Delia Smith saying she can do fairy cakes. You mean a chicken impersonation? How did it go? "It depends," she said patiently, "which kind of chicken you mean." OK, I said, do a Buff Orpington. And in the chapel-like, grandfather-clock-ticking silence of her museum-like living room, Ms Simmonds produced a long-drawn-out, cluck-free note, seething with melancholy, reverberating with regret: a perfect hen.

She was Rosemary at the font; Posy was a winsome variant of Rosie that stuck. Born in 1945, "on the day the hem fell on Nagasaki, funny enough", she grew up in Cookham Dene, Berkshire, the village that's still best known as the home of Stanley Spencer, the artist who painted the arrival of Christ at the local regatta. "I met him once," Posy said



Posy Simmonds on children: "Usually they want me to draw them things from Super Nintendo games"

proudly. "He was painting the angel at the lychee gate of Cookham church, with his pram beside him containing all his materials. I remember saying 'Hello Stanley Spencer'. He said, 'Have a Spangle' so I did. It was a red one." She was one of five children born to a well-to-do dairy farmer. Her mother was "a very capable woman. I can remember her ironing 11 tons of shirts, when my brothers started going to parties, or sloping off looking for some peace and quiet

London – and the relationship that launched her career. "I was a very callow art student. I'd just left school and had no work and nowhere to live. But I'd met Mel Calman [the late Times cartoonist] who helped me in lots of ways. He said casually, my friend Jill Tweedie has a spare room – why not try her? So I rang her up out of the blue, and she said, it's still free, come over. And I became her lodger. It was the most extraordinary house off the Old

absolutely eye-opening."

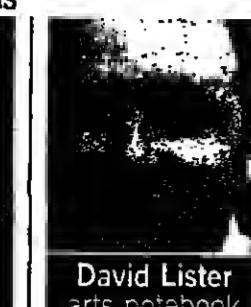
It was on Tweedie's seminal but much-ridiculed *Guardian Women's Page* that the Posy strip was born, and it does not take a genius to see the germ of Wendy and George and their homemade-wine-and-deconstructionist-theory lifestyle in this description, although Posy isn't keen on such simple correspondences. Jill Tweedie's death from motor neurone disease (the same year as Mel Calman's death) took away a mentor as much as a friend. "She made me think and look at things. She'd ask me all kinds of things about feminist matters which I hadn't thought about at all. She was amazingly stimulating."

Later she showed me her study, where a great wooden desk groans under a slew of papers. Posy works at a second desk, in front of a large mirror – not from vanity, but so that she can check the exact quality of her characters' facial expressions, as modelled by herself. She is completing a collection of illustrations for Belloc's *Cautious Tales*, and working on her *magnum opus*.

It's a graphic novel "about adultery and soft furnishings", which will take her another year to finish and will then be serialised in a newspaper. From a privileged sneak preview, it seems a more serious undertaking than anything she's done before, full of narrative, facial close-ups, balloons and a faint air of decadence. Completing it will be slow, painstaking, hothouse work. She wonders if she should be doing some travel, getting out more, trying other things – but you know her heart isn't in such adventures. Her heart is in her work. Like a Victorian seamstress, she is happiest stitching and restitching tiny details of line and shade into works of the utmost proportion, harmony and charm – miniature, like the life she embodies, but perfect.

Famous Fred: coming to a small screen near you

Kent Road. And the first time I'd seen a Sixties conversion, with the stairs going straight down to the kitchen. The details stayed with me for a long time." It was, in short, the time of the Great Sixties Lifestyle Shift, which Posy, with her sharp eye for social leakage and behavioural posturing, took to like Cleopatra to ases' milk. "It was the first time I'd seen all kinds of things, like a duvet. Luc [Jill Tweedie's three-year-old son] had one because his father was Dutch. I remember thinking, this is not adequate covering for a child's bed, this *courtpagne*. And the first time I saw a split hot and cooker, I kept thinking, Where on earth is the stove? Jill would have people over all the time, sitting around the table and talking endlessly, criticising things. Her table in the sitting room was always piled with books. It was



David Lister
arts notebook

It always surprises me when actors and actresses claim a deep affinity with the characters they are playing. Surely it demands less talent to play yourself or someone physically, spiritually and emotionally like yourself than it does to play someone who is temperamentally a complete stranger. Were I on the Academy Awards Committee that's how my thinking would go. Nevertheless, Madonna, now an Oscar possibility for *Evita*, this week claimed she identified "on many levels" with Eva Peron, from their mutual love of dancing to coming from a small town and hitting the big city and achieving "something incredible" with their lives. Madonna still seemed to be identifying with her president's wife when I met her this week and she graciously allowed me to kiss her hand. She told me she doesn't know what her next project will be. I suggest that in the interests of role identification she should steer clear of *Hedda Gabler*.

The Policy Studies Institute this week released the most comprehensive account of arts funding in the UK yet published. The study, "Culture as Commodity", received scant attention, perhaps because the year it focused on, 1993-94, was the year before the introduction of the National Lottery, which rather moved the goalposts on arts funding. It is not without its interesting statistics though. The study shows that only 50 per cent of arts funding comes from the Department of National Heritage, Scottish Office, Welsh Office and Northern Ireland Office. Fourteen per cent comes from other government departments, 24 per cent from local government, five per cent from Europe, four per cent from business and four per cent from charities, trusts and volunteers. It's a surprise that DNH ministers, faced with the annual campaign over the size of the DNH grant to the arts, do not point out these other sources of funding more vociferously. I suspect that in future they will.

Talking of statistics, the Royal Albert Hall has uncovered a few of its own in a glossy new booklet celebrating its 125th anniversary. England and Italy competed at the turn of the century in an indoor marathon race, doing 524 laps of the Hall in 1909. A mass baptism complete with the "river Jordan", a galvanised iron tank surrounded with sand and flowers, took place at Easter 1928. The Beatles and Rolling Stones appeared on the same bill in 1963. Yet when Frank Sinatra, Liza Minnelli and Sammy Davis Jr appeared together in 1969, it was called the Ultimate Event.

National Theatre actor Colin Stinton's feat of appearing in two of the complex's theatres on the same night – changing costumes several times as he rushes back and forth from the all-singing, all-dancing *Guys and Dolls* to the quiet tragedy of *Death of a Salesman* – is commendable but doomed. One of these nights he will quite simply flip, cut down in his acting prime by a case of theatrical split personality as he grabs Willy Loman's lapels and yells "Sit down you're rocking the boat". His fate is clear – a lengthy sojourn in the Royal Hospital For Split Personality Actors, where he will spend his days playing dominoes with Madonna.



F-Freezing ABC: a simple alphabets

FREEZING ABC

Posy Simmonds' *FREEZING ABC* is a simple alphabets book. It features a variety of winter-themed illustrations, including a snowman, a reindeer, and a snowflake. The book is designed to teach children the alphabet through fun and engaging illustrations.

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arts & books

Flitter-brained pseud-heads

X marks the Nineos. Douglas Coupland's latest book follows the Generation X he identified at the beginning of the decade - still lost, but finding their way through frantic consumerism: still empty, but filling up with strange new machine dreams. Where Coupland's "X" identifies an aching desire, the "X" of *The X-Files* describes a howling panic - about science, government, spirituality, reality itself. The academics in *Deny All Knowledge*, are rushing in to stake their claim on the phenomenon. But do these crosses cover the same terrain? How much of the decade lies between these two letters?

Coupland deliberately sets the paradox of the Nineties before us in a series of "microstories" from Washington at the height of the "Super Tuesday" electoral decider in 1992. These are four individuals variously involved in Beltway politics, who are brilliantly casual readers of the signs of their times. Yet this semiotic articulacy, this refrigerated cool, only compensates for a general powerlessness.

Matthew the activist, sucking on a Snapple in a campaign office, can eviscerate the smug 21-year-olds "eagerly building a political component into their resumes". He can snap-judge the RepubliCrat consensus as "the Disney version of democracy". Yet he also knows that "all the old tricks of success in the world" - education, a broad skill base, literacy, numeracy - are no longer guarantees of anything". In spare moments, his childhood dream returns to him: hungry urchins looking for food in the White House.

Tim is a "vulnerability consultant" for politicians, who interviews the impoverished ex-mistresses of important senators, worshipping his database as it locates "sensitive spots" for his clients. Yet one day, Tim finds himself transfixed by the excavation of some old Washington earth by sewage contractors: his keyboard-flossed fingers rake through 18th-century muck, looking for "antique junk... maybe a few coins".

Coupland keeps rubbing the media-led immateriality of the Nineties - all those brand names, TV memories, digital morphings - in the dirt of an elemental materialism. What fascinates him about the Grateful Dead concert early in this decade, for example, is the clash between the pure low-tech Deadheads of the Sixties and the modern-using, flitter-brained Pseud-Heads of the Nineties.

The old lament the trinket superficiality of the young: the young sneer at the earthy lassitude of the old. Yet both congregate in vast American spaces - the hipsters to "appreciate the true Dead spirit", the digital generation to find "constructive new hints on how to deal with the new thought-based economy". Perhaps the fact that there can be such a classical tussle between generations - but on a common terrain of narcotics, music and technology - shows how futuristic the nineties are.

Screw up your eyes, and Coupland's stories are like a post-modern *Dubliners*: snapshots of a community huddled around the edge of a new century, yearning for togetherness but having to build it carefully, day by day, fragment by fragment.

The X-Files identifies another key faultline of the Nineties - the changing boundary between self and world to the West that the speedier Californians call the "post-human condition". Coupland's X-generation are soft, squashy, cybernetic souls, so determined by mall culture that they become "microsites" - over-exploited but gently cynical. Perhaps, hazards Coupland, this weakness is a kind of strength. "How are we to know that people with 'no lives'"

Pat Kane contemplates new Yuppie fluidity in a post-human world

aren't really on the new frontier of human sentience?"

The X-Files accepts that there may well be a real paradigm shift going on, but the programme reacts in an opposed way. It is upright, nervously paranoid, pitting reason and unreason against each other in a holy war. These are yuppies who can't cope with the new, fluid times - who fearfully recognise the chaos of modern culture, with its electronic spectres and apparitions, as indicating something "beyond" nature.

The academic papers in *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files* make much of the tension between the series' agents as they pursue the inexplicable - Fox Mulder's open-mindedness, Dana Scully's frowning scepticism. But they're still *The Suit With Two Heads*, crisp public-sector professionals, upon whose starched shirts beat shadowy monsters.

As the editors say, there could be nothing less like 1980s

camp irony than the slogan "The Truth Is Out There".

Read it literally, and you have the Enlightenment project in a nutshell. But this is Western rationality gone wild-eyed,

hunting interbred human-alien. Its "agents" are subverted in their agency: they find mysterious electronic chips in their necks and suffer hallucinations that undermine their identities. Whereas Coupland's

selves are blending into the new times, *The X-Files* shows the self under siege, struggling to awake from the nightmare of orthodox reason.

Of course, it's only a TV show. One of the good things about *Deny All Knowledge*, as opposed to the rest of the X-

philia on the X-mas shelves, is its

pedantic but useful cultural-studies approach to the phenomenon. It's sweet to see academics light-footed enough to do their audience research on-line. Their quotations from alt-x-files newsgroups and America On-Line forums bring bursts of colour into the gummetal-grey of methodology.

Yet books like this make me very annoyed with cultural studies. There are so many important analytic tools deployed here - about the X-Files in relation to mythology, late capitalism, sexual ambiguity, TV genre, police history. But if you didn't speak Theory and weren't willing to tolerate writing styles chunky beyond belief, you'd throw the book away in five minutes. If there's any refuge left in this accelerated world for reflection on where we're going, it has to be in academia. Yet what use is this realm if it results in esoteric chatter? Public prose, rather than private code, is the least subsidised intellectuals can do for us.

Otherwise, you rely on smooth pop essayists like Coupland to make sense of the era. Unless you've been around a little, it's all too easy to agree with his weightless euphoria about the Nineties. I seized on his essay about Palo Alto, Silicon Valley's middle-class dream town, having been there myself. Coupland is bourgeois-rhapsodic: Palo Alto "turks in the backs of many minds as the ideal that is worth fighting for". Lawn sprinklers sprinkle, craft shops sell, Stanford students dawdle, software geniuses make millions.

Indeed they do. But beyond the picket fences, Palo Alto has its ramshackle immigrant quarter, an appalling ghetto into which the info-class's Latino gardeners and maids are cast at the end of each day.

In 1994, East PA became the murder capital of America - totting up more fatal shootings per head of population than any other urban area. Yes, info-capitalism blurs and mixes everything, turns ground into lava, destructively creates a new world. But some of its dead really do deserve one true Polaroid, at least.

Polaroids from the Dead
by Douglas Coupland,
Flamingo, £12.99

Deny all Knowledge: reading
the X-Files
edited by David Lavery,
Angela Hague and
Maria Cartwright,
Faber, £8.99

Off-line alien (left) in 'Anasazi' and (right) Scully, the female half of "the suit with two heads" pursues the inexplicable in 'End Game'

Suits case

Hugo Barnacle on a style warrior

Dressed to Kill by Jay McInerney and others, Flammerton, £29.95

In the first essay of this handsomely-produced symposium on James Bond as style warrior, Jay McInerney recalls the impact of the early Bond films on an America where any man "who knew too much about food and wine, or clothes, was suspected of - shall we say femininity?"

McInerney's childhood hero until then was the rustic but sincere Congressman Davy Crockett, as played in the Disney film by Fess Parker. "To remember just how rugged and frontier-like American life was in many respects at that time, I recall that my family, living in a suburb near Seattle in 1963, had just discovered an exotic new food called pizza."

All the same, "The country at large was undoubtedly ready for Bond," because of John F Kennedy. He listed Ian Fleming's *From Russia With Love* as one of his ten favourite novels in *Life*, "after Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*".

After his assassination, the importance of Bond was all the greater as "the dead president's British alter ego continued to elude assassins." But for schoolboys there was another element of empathy with 007. "From the moment that a boy first identifies the sexual impulse, which in my case was about 1963 until the moment that he consummated his most profoundly burning ambition, life is a case of espionage."

McInerney, like many, has never quite grown out of the Bond thing, and still finds himself coming to London to have suits made on the Row and clock up some serious wine-sampling. Even when you aren't out to score, the sophisticated worldliness of Bond offers a good role.

The ideas should have been laughed to death by now but it won't lie down. This book's compiler, Colin Woodhead, has found some wonderfully naff ads for the rather downmarket 007-branded clothes and drinks that over-proliferated in 1965. And the mockery led to the decade-long Roger Moore cycle, when audiences would only accept Bond as pantomime.

Many stills from those films appear here, featuring Moore's leisurewear in all its grisly glory. But as Woodhead points out, Moore was "comparatively restrained" for the time: the picture shows him with his hairdresser, whose suit and shirt defy description and make Roger look a model of understated chic. People forget just how staggeringly awful the Seventies really were.

An essay by Neil Norman relates the change in fortunes of the suit, "off the shoulders of the heroes" such as Sean Connery and "on to the backs of villains" in films like *Die Hard*. Good guys dressed down to the point where Bruce Willis won the day in a grubby (but sincere) vest, while Alan Rickman plumped for a well-deserved death in snide, supercilious Armani.

The book concludes with a weak PR *apologia* by Nick Sullivan for the Italian tailors Brioni, who clothed Brosnan for too richly in *GoldenEye*. Bond is a bit of a Calvinist and Connery's severe Savile Row suits were the only right way to dress the part. Oh, and next time, Mr Brosnan, do like Sean and tuck those pocket flaps in. It's a British thing. If you leave them out you look like an enemy imposter who hasn't quite mastered the drill. Connery's original Bond would shoot you on sight.

The squint, the sigh, and the soul of a loner

Graham McCann follows the fortunes of a shifting star

Clint Eastwood by Richard Schickel, Cape, £17.99

Clint Eastwood is one movie star who seems to have grown bigger as the pictures have grown smaller. Over a career that spans four decades, he has graduated from bland hit-parade player in 13-movies ("Nice guy - zip personality, zip talent", read his first studio report), to television star (as Rowdy Yates, "idiot of the plains", in *Rawhide*), to Hollywood outsider (the "Man With No Name" of Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns), to Hollywood anti-hero (*Dirty Harry*), to Hollywood auteur (*Bird*, *Unforgiven*), to Hollywood institution, a latter-day Gary Cooper, the Good American.

If, as Emerson warned us, we all come eventually to "clay the honey of each peculiar greatness", then Eastwood's slow and subtle evolution has helped preserve and enhance the novelty of his appeal far beyond the first flush of stardom.

Richard Schickel's major new biography - written with Eastwood's co-operation chronicles the development of this extraordinary career. The life is, for the most part, treated to the kind of politely discreet once-over that

is customary with (semi) authorised studies - at times, indeed, one senses the author pulling back, perhaps fearing a repetition of that famously threatening utterance, "Go ahead, make my day" - but the career is subjected to admirably rigorous scrutiny.

It divides, broadly, into three parts: the first, the early years, and the invention of a distinctive screen image - the strong, silent American, with the squint, the sigh and the soul of the loner, the man who expresses the problems men have in making connections (with other men, with women, with communities, even - or especially - with their best selves); second, a time of reflection on the stardom this image attracted, and a period of ironic commentary; and third, a mature acceptance of the extent to which the image has now become the man.

It is the second of these parts that Schickel suggests, convincingly, holds the key to Eastwood's enduring success. *A Fistful of Dollars* and its two sequels made Eastwood a curiosity, and *Dirty Harry* made him a star, but, as Schickel notes, it was the series of

lighted movies in the second half of the Seventies that brought depth to that stardom: "In every great star career", writes Schickel, "there comes a time to signal in some completely obvious way that whatever the joke about you, you're in on it." Such self-satire, if it comes too soon in a career, can come over as cynicism, while if it comes too late it can seem like desperation, but, in Eastwood's case (with movies such as *Bronco Billy*), it came at just the right time.

That Eastwood was able to act on such good judgment owed much to the effective manner in which he had exploited what Schickel terms his rage both "for and against" order. His rage for order showed itself in the formulation at the start of the Seventies of Malpaso, his independent production company, and its subsequent second career as his own director and producer.

His rage against order has shown itself, says Schickel, in the way he has used this hard-won independence to celebrate those characters who symbolise that stubborn resistance to order. This complex rage, argues

Schickel, is the thing that engages us: "in a time when public figures are forever trying to ingratiate themselves with us, you can see something exemplary in his on-screen refusal to be easily liked, and in his off-screen refusal to be easily understood."

Schickel's biography is, by some way, the best so far of this most self-conscious of stars, but, at over 500 pages in length, it is perhaps a little too indulgent for its, and its subject's, own good. At a time when there are too many writers straining to write big books, and too few striving to write brilliant essays, it is a pity that Richard Schickel, who is a brilliant essayist, should have been badgered or bullied into compiling a book quite as big as this. With fewer laboured summaries of the star's lesser movies, and more of the author's typically incisive and humane insights into the star's life and image, it would have been a shorter but more accomplished discursive.

As it is, this is still a very welcome and often rather enlightening account of an intriguing man and a slyly inventive star.



Clint Eastwood: anti-hero or Hollywood institution?

"a book about legends and lies, about great loves and little betrayals, about the myth of truth and the consequences of deception. As such it is a work of rare brilliance" PETER MILLAR, *The Times*



le Carré

Brazen and brainless in Byzantium

Philip Mansel on a city that hosted high life but no high thought

Istanbul: the Imperial City by John Freely, Viking, £22.50

Geography and history make Istanbul unique. No other city besides two continents. No other city has a longer or more continuous imperial past: capital of the Byzantine Empire from 330 to 1453, and the Ottoman Empire from 1453 to 1922. Writers have responded with appropriately deferential epithets: "the city of all cities", "the Queen of cities", or simply, as it is still called by many Greeks, "the City".

John Freely has lived in Istanbul during its transformation from a relatively forgotten city of a million, as it was when he arrived to teach in 1960, into today's commercial metropolis of more than 12 million people. Having written guide books to Greece, Athens and the Cyclades, as well as four books about Istanbul itself, Freely has an especial sympathy for the Greek heritage of this Turkish city. He notes that liturgies are still celebrated on their feast-day for the city's founder the Emperor Constantine, and his mother Helena, at the church of Saints Constantine and Helena in Samatya. Every

Feast of the Annunciation, and during the following Lent, both Turks and Greeks drink the sacred water at the fountain of the Virgin of Blachernae, in commemoration of her success in saving the city from besieging Avars in 626.

Freely abounds in colourful details about, for example, the lovers of the Empress Zoe or the laments composed by the last Janissaries after their corps' destruction in 1826, while hiding from the Sultan's forces in the chambers used to heat the baths of the city. He is especially eloquent on the physical setting of the city, on the varieties of winds, boats and fish which crowd into the Bosphorus, the tawny-lined waterway separating Europe and Asia.

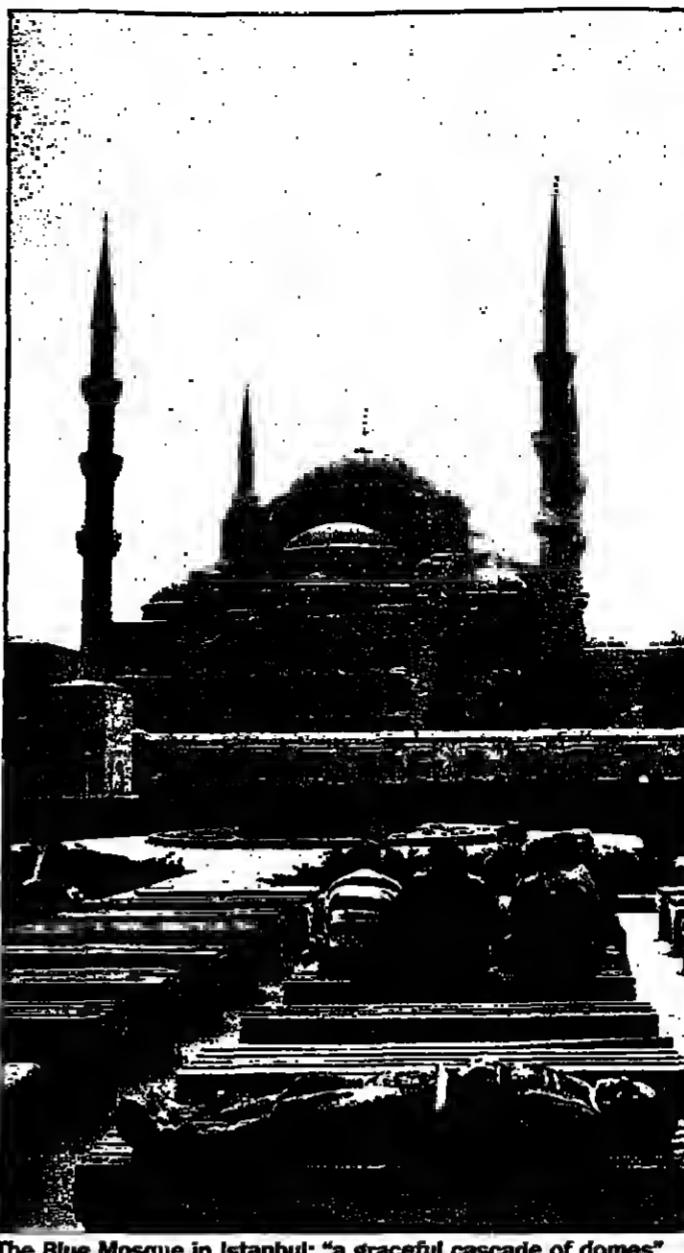
Some winds are named after roasting walnuts, the Pleiades or cuckoos. According to Freely, one or two caravels - ships of the type in which Columbus sailed to America - still use the Bosphorus. At the end of the book there is a gazetteer on the monuments and museums of the city, such as the great Sultan Ahmed mosque with its "graceful

cascade of domes and minarets". However, his book is essentially a gallop through 1600 years of imperial history (the periods preceding the foundation of the city and following the end of the Ottoman Empire are also covered). Constantine succeeds Constantine, Mehmed succeeds Murad. The city expands, contracts, and after the Ottoman conquest, expands again. For a time, it becomes as in its Byzantine heyday, the largest city in Europe. Yet its way of life and culture, at once creation and creator of the rulers in the palace, are neglected. Readers learn more about the events of their reigns - many of them well outside the city - than about the laws, food and clothes prevalent in Istanbul.

Freely does not address the central paradox of the city. According to one Byzantine writer, Constantinople gleamed with gold and porphyry. An Ottoman poet claimed that it made heaven itself gasp with envy. However, one characteristic of the city, in addition to physical beauty and imperial tradition, is an absence of creativity and intellectual curiosity. They were less apparent, on the seven hills of Byzantium and along the shores of the Bosphorus, than religious fervour or desire for power.

Istanbul produced few, or no, geniuses comparable to those who flourished in Baghdad, Vienna or Paris. The published diaries, letters and memoirs of its inhabitants are often less revealing than those of foreign visitors. For an international metropolis which was the focus of pleasure, ambition and trade for millions, and gloried in the epithet "Refuge of the Universe", this is bewildering.

Possibly, personal creativity was crushed by the repressive weight of the state. Perhaps residence in the capital of a state without fixed frontiers, constantly attacking or attacked, made the government and its inhabitants particularly reserved. John Freely should write his own explanation - and his predictions for the future of this city which is now, for the first time in its history, ruled by a fundamentalist Islamic administration.



The Blue Mosque in Istanbul: "a graceful cascade of domes"

A week in books

Who can you rely on for a Christmas Day family ritual? Church, monarchy and even the Disney Corporation seem to have tired of shoring up morale at home. So, into this festive vacuum, steps Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*, on BBC1, will unite the nation around a screeching horde of computerised velociraptors.

£300 million box-office receipts and a place of honour in most living-rooms: not bad for a movie with all the wit of a brontosaurus brain. It belongs in a sequence of epics - from *Jaws* to *Schindler's List* - whose role as modern sacraments far outrun their value as mere films. Oprah Winfrey once even said to him: "I sometimes feel that you aren't a real person, Steven, but that God has loaned you to us". Time for what Barry Humphries would call a Technicolour yawn.

That quote surfaces in Andrew Yule's new biography, *Steven Spielberg: father to the man* (Little, Brown, £16.99). Yule is a dogged sleuth with a rather weary line in *Variety*-style Hollywood patter, but his tireless research only serves to show how hard it is to fix in words this nerdy shaman's power. This book can explain, for example, why Spielberg knocked a year off his age. (Supposedly born in 1947, he has in fact just passed what Yule calls "the big 5-0".)

However, Spielberg's ability to create an ersatz catharsis in Bradford and Bogota alike calls for a critic with the combined strengths of Pauline Kael and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Faced with the task of assessment, Yule too often reaches for his fat cuttings file. It could be that the non-reading tycoon will always baffle old-style verbal types. Rather than respecting words, he stiles safe Good Books (*The Color Purple*, *Empire of the Sun*, *Schindler's Ark*) in primitive reverence.

If the movies' future turned on what lies under Spielberg's baseball cap, we might well despair. But as John Pierson's smart and breezy chronicle of low-budget hustling in *Spikes*, *Mike, Slackers & Dykes* (Faber, £11.99) shows, one glory of recent US indie cinema has been its flair for fast and funny scripts. From Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* to Kevin Smith's *Clerks*, nifty words have staged a comeback. And no one could accuse the ultra-gobby Tarantino of promoting strong, silent heroes. So, with luck, the future on film may sound a bit more eloquent than the roar of a digitised *T Rex*.

Boyd Tonkin



The books you listen to

Soul food for Christmas. Godly and ungodly alike will enjoy David Suchet's calm, inspirational reading of *The Gospel According to St Luke* (Penguin, 3hrs, £8.99). Unabridged from the King James version, itself meant, of course, to be read aloud, it has more familiar quotes per minute than *Hamlet*. The Bible must these days rank embarrassingly high on people's "Books I mean to read" list. Do it the easy way, perhaps in the course of commuting to work now that *Today* has got so cantankerous, with this tasteful selection of the best hits of *The Old Testament* (Naxos, c 8hrs, £16.99), read brilliantly by a strong and varied cast, again in the authorised version.

Christina Hardymon

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The flesh and the spirit

Chris Savage King applauds a romantic lord of the dance

Secret Muses: the life of Frederick Ashton by Julie Kavanagh, Faber, £25



Ashton: "driven to dance"

ous, and romance is often implied in his rhapsodic *pas de deux*.

In his private life, Ashton much preferred the role of the hunter to that of the chased, and this seems to have been a canny artistic decision.

Ashton's work exemplifies Englishness in the best sense - combining comedy and *joie de vivre* with a lush romanticism rarely seen today. Artefacts like *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and Adventures in Motion Pictures's over-lauded production of *Swan Lake* are praised in these terms, but are only shadows of Ashton's artistic accomplishments, which have wit, passion and true grandeur. His ballets embody a temperament and sensibility both deeply recognisable, and also unique. His works deserve to live on in performance forever.

He considered meeting the designer Sophie Fedorovitch "the greatest luck be ever had" and his career with the Royal Ballet was directed by Ninette de Valois. He frequently composed ballets through dancer improvisations, and his work gave a central place to women.

Along with Balanchine, Ashton took classical ballet to peaks of beauty and perfection that the form is unlikely to achieve again. He was a master at revealing character through movement; his work stressed the intrinsic tenderness of the body, and its capacity for feeling and emotion. Attention to detail was lavished on all his creations, from the lofty heights of *The Dream's Titania*, to the strutting hens in *La Fille Mal Gardée*. His source material was often slight, but once alchemised into dance, the effect was rarely trivial.

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The scent of aubergines

Carole Angier and D J Taylor review the latest fiction from an invisible celebrity and an unsung hero

Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* burst upon the literary scene ten years ago. It was alarmingly nasty. Its serial-killer hero, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, was born without any odour of his own hut, in compensation, with a pretentiously powerful nose. The hardest thing on earth to capture in words is smell. But Grenouille's inhuman gift for the creation of scents was perfectly expressed in Süskind's gift for describing them.

Next came *The Perfume*, in which again the telling mirrors the tale of a man so withdrawn that the telling is barely audible. Then he wrote *The Story of Mr Sommer*, which isn't the story of Mr Sommer at all but of a boy growing up in postwar Germany who meets and remeets the mysterious Mr S.

They are all finely crafted parables, set on the edge of madness, and it would be nice to be able to say that *Three Starlets & a Reflection* (Bloomsbury, £10.95) is a return to that original form. Alas, no: this is an extremely slender offering which seems to me to dig a narrowing tunnel to a literary dead end.

The richest story, "Mafte Musard's Bequest", the closest to *Perfume*, is an ambitious, young man's story, in which the dying Mafte reveals a vision of the death of the universe.

The other, later stories all seem to reflect to the traps and terrors of the writing life. In "Death Wish",

a young woman artist is tipped into depression and suicide by a critic's idle remark. In "A Battle", a stranger plays chess so coolly that a group of Sunday players imagines him to be the bold and brilliant Master they long for, though it's clear he's a vulgar sham.

The reflection, "Amnesia in Literis", is about a professional literary man who has forgotten everything he has ever read. This happens, if you read for a living, you do forget a lot. But the anonymous hero has lost everything, except one line: "You must change your life."

If "Death Wish" and "A Battle" express Süskind's artistic fears, "Amnesia in Literis" contains his recognition that he has reached the end of the road. And then I noticed the dates of these stories: 1979, 1981 and 1985. He managed *Mr Sommer* in 1991. But I hardly dare ask where Patrick Süskind is now. (CA)

I would be wrong, perhaps, to call John Murray an underrated writer - the jacket of his new novel carries salutations from Jonathan Coe, Margaret Forster and William Palmer - but it would be accurate to call him an under-purchased one. Published by small presses in the North of England, his novels sell in hundreds rather than thousands and his reputation survives on word-of-mouth.

This age-old story of neglect would hardly be worth bothering about were it not for the fierce and witty John Murray, who has a talent being neglected. *Radio Activity*, Murray's last novel, was a send-up of the Cumbrian nuclear industry. *Reiver Blues* (Flambard, £8.99), also set in the debatable lands around Carlisle is similarly eclectic stew, taking in surreal comedy, border history and international politics together with oriental sex manuals and exotic cuisine.

Most of it defies summary. Beginning with the panic attack experienced by Samuel Beatty, plump middle-aged further education tutor and Sanskrit expert, on discovering the dismal state of world affairs in that morning's *Guardian*, the novel soon snakes out beyond Samuel's relationship with his skinny, apparently duplicitous wife, Vanessa, to the local history of the 1950s, a pseudo-philosophical investigation of the nature of "borders" and the subtle application of these findings to various international trouble spots.

Ranging from straightforward funny dialogue to a much more savage, if understated, political satire, *Reiver Blues* is distinctly un-English in most of its influences and associations. It creates a kind of borders magic realism reminiscent of *Mitteleuropa* rhapsodies such as *Hrabal* and *Esterhazy*. Nevertheless, what emerges from this agglomeration of sex, spectres and Murray's abiding aubergine fixation is a beguiling example of the English regional novel. (DT)

Paperbacks

By Christopher Hirst and Lucasta Miller

Sir John Soane Architect by Dorothy Stroud (de la Mare, £18.99) Handsomely illustrated and scrupulously researched, this classic work reveals the energy and versatility of our finest architect after Wren. At its heart lies a tantalising sequence of interiors from Soane's masterpiece, the Bank of England, all but destroyed by bureaucratic vandalism in the Twenties. His unique style, seen here in designs ranging from a brewery to the interior of No 10 Downing Street, borrowed from both the classical and gothic traditions.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience by Jerry Hopkins (Plexus, £9.99) Though Hopkins does a fair job on the facts of Hendrix's early life - we learn how the hero of the underground beat a car-stealing rap by joining the paratroopers - he comes unstuck with the music: "a single noise in the cosmos... football-field-sized sheets of steel falling from the tops of cliffs."

Understandably, the audience at the first Jimi Hendrix Experience gig in Croydon were "numbed". How a hacking guitarist on the chittering circuit was suddenly

transformed into rock's most innovative performer is unexplained - but we are amply enlightened about sex and drugs and post-mortem litigation.

Dear Dodie: the life of Dodie Smith by Valerie Grove (Pimlico, £10) Brought out just in time to coincide with the recent film, this lively biography of the woman who created *101 Dalmatians* reveals her as a delightfully English eccentric, even if it doesn't manage to establish her as anything more than a minor talent. Her happy Lancashire

childhood was followed by a miserable youth as an unsuccessful actress, during which she developed her tastes both for married men and exotic costumes. She worked as a shop assistant in Heals before turning to writing. In her prime, it was as a playwright that she was most famous, though one gets the impression that her plays would seem rather fey and sentimental today. (Ps. You're not meant to judge a book by its cover, but the spotty jacket is such a triumph of graphic design that it deserves a mention.)

Making the Cat Laugh: one woman's journal of single life on the margins by Lynn Truss (Penguin, £6.99) In past ages, a lone female with a cat was in danger of being prosecuted for witchcraft. These days, she's more likely to become a

columnist, judging from this collection of pieces written for the *Times*, the *Listener* and *Woman's Journal*. Lynn Truss's doting attitude towards her feline friends is, in fact, the least funny thing in the book. It's her knack for lateral thinking - for pointing out the obvious in such a way that it becomes hilariously surreal - that provides the laugh-out-loud moments.

Strange Landscape by Christopher Frayling (Penguin/BBC, £6.99) Stemming from Frayling's television "journey through the Middle Ages", the text is as patchy as the series - wonderful about the great medieval cathedrals, long-winded on Abelard and Heloise. The introduction, which underlines the significance of the Middle Ages today, is stuffed with embarrassing lists of heavy metal bands and suchlike.

Frayling provides an exciting entrée to an alien era, but it is unforgivable that this edition has been ransacked of all illustrations.

Journals Mid-Fifties 1954-1958 by Allen Ginsberg (Penguin, £12.50) A pyrotechnical display of poetry, pornography and *prurientiamen* from the poet as he straddles his 30th year. Modesty is not his strong suit - "Pluto, Shakespeare, Michelangelo and Ginsberg all loved boys." Younger readers mystified by the appeal of a soggy old mystic only have to read a single page of this litany for a powerful reminder why Ginsberg exerted such influence in the Sixties. One highlight is a sleazy European tour with fellow Beats: "Peter needs a shave. I need a bath. Gregory needs a new personality."

THE TAILOR OF PANAMA

"le Carré shows what an extraordinarily witty writer he can be...spectacularly funny"

Marcel Berlins, *The Sunday Times*



Postmodern. Maybe

POP No Way Sis, The Empire Theatre, London By Andrew Mueller

No Way Sis are not the first tribute act – this tawdry phenomenon, pioneered by Björn Again and the Australian Doors, has been with us for some time. No Way Sis are, however, unusual among tribute bands in the approval they have received from their idols (Noel Gallagher gave No Way Sis the guitar with which he recorded "Some Might Say") and unique in that they have a major record deal – their first single is a cover of the New Seekers's "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing", the song Oasis re-wrote as "Shakermaker".

This alone is postmodern enough to induce migraine; the further associations the song has with the slogans "Things go better with Coke" and "The real thing" could almost fuel speculation that No Way Sis were conceived as a quasi-situationist prank, a living critique of the Oasis Leviathan, a witteringly accurate satire. Sadly, this hugely attractive notion is dispelled as soon as the five young Scots amble on-stage. They mean every last third-hand riff of it. They betray not the slightest flicker of recognition of the patent absurdity of it all.

As they plough through their note-perfect facsimiles of the Gallagher songbook, hamstrung only by the faux-Liam's comically inadequate

voice, it's interesting to note the effect No Way Sis's stony-faced conviction has on the audience. At the start, the applause that greets them resembles the mocking, grudgingly welcoming reception a third division football grandstand affords the hapless but well-meaning centre-forward they tolerate in the knowledge that the real Alan Shearer has better things to do than bless their modest arena with his presence. By halfway, after No Way Sis have rattled off "Roll With It", "Round Are Way" and "Slide Away", the crowd, though sparse, have been well and truly won over, willing accomplices to a cheeky confidence trick.

Which, as they leave in a well-rehearsed Gallagher lop, has a certain symmetry to it. It's only a scaled-down re-enactment of the coup the real Oasis have pulled off, successfully selling themselves, then the country and then half the world – and counting – on the idea that they are the greatest rock 'n' roll band on the planet, their glaring limitations notwithstanding. That said, it remains a peculiar thought that No Way Sis are about to have a hit with the song the band they are impersonating ripped off to make themselves worthy of impersonating in the first place.



Liam-lookalike teaches world to sing: the real thing has no shame, so why should he? EDWARD STYKES

God bless them every one

THEATRE A Christmas Carol, Lyric, Hammersmith

Charles Dickens himself made a fortune doing solo readings from *A Christmas Carol*, so it is hardly surprising to find theatres turning his well-loved tale of Yuletide redemption into a Christmas show. A couple of years back, the RSC threw their resources at a grandiose staging but, despite some beautiful designs, it never rose above sentimentality. *Scrooge*, currently playing in a rickety, inept production at London's Dominion Theatre.

Neil Bartlett's new version at the Lyric Hammersmith is considerably more slimline but paradoxically, it's far richer. Bartlett is the last person you expect to espouse Victorian values but one glance at the poster announcing Mr Richard Briers gives you a glimpse of what's in for. Not that he has suddenly taken up authentic performance practice. He sticks to Victorian style, but plays it with contemporary theatrical storytelling techniques and Nineties anachronistic flourishes. The hustling townsfolk push supermarket trolleys

and the excellent seven-strong ensemble switch costume, role and gender with consummate ease, wearing train-cars beneath their frock coats and crinolines. It must be mayhem backstage as they rush behind the scenes to pop up as chorus, carollers and a multiplicity of characters. The performance I saw quelled a noisy audience of children into a (mostly) rapt silence, a testament to the atmosphere of clarity and concentration flowing between the cast and their public; no small feat considering Bartlett's risky decision to stick with the Victorian phraseology of Dickens's original.

Bartlett knows that effective storytelling is the key and he strips everything down to preserve it. Carol-singing is used to tie scenes together but Chris McIvor's arrangements avoid the obvious, cloying cadences of traditional harmonies; gone, too, is the sickly sentimentality that tends to lurk around the Cratchits. Briers abandons his trademark niceness to present a powerfully mean-spirited Scrooge. Most actors signal the happy ending from the word go, going about

their nastiness with a nudge and a wink, but Briers never slips into coyness. As a result, his journey is properly moving, his outburst of happiness genuinely joyous.

To 18 Jan. Booking: 0181-741 2311

By David Benedict



Bah, humbug! Richard Briers as a powerfully mean-spirited Scrooge JOHN HAYNES

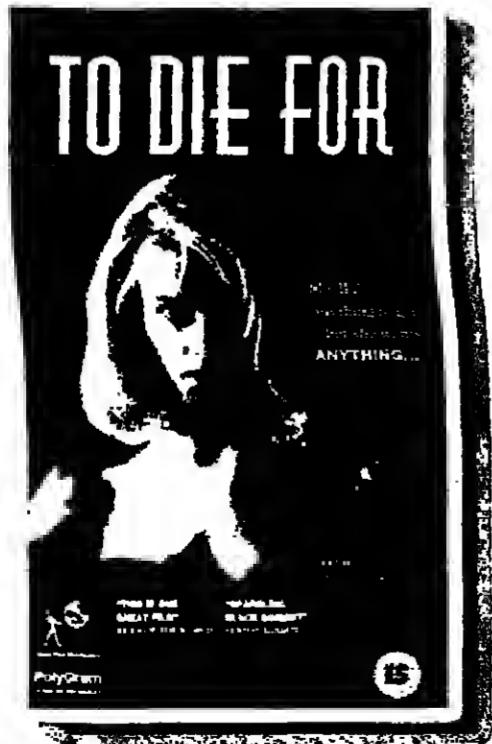
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	THE MUSICAL Guys and Dolls	THE FILM Evita	THE BALLET The Nutcracker
overview	Richard Eyre revives his legendary production of Frank Loesser's great American musical comedy, based on stories by Damon Runyon, designed by John Gunter, lighting by David Hersey, choreographed by David Toguri, with Imelda Staunton, Henry Goodman, Joanna Riding, Clarke Peters and Clive Rowe.	The inevitable film version of the Lloyd Webber / Rice musical, with a script by Oliver Stone and director Alan Parker – the man who gave us <i>Fame</i> – starring Madonna as the iconic Argentinian queen of hearts (and fascist concubine) Eva Peron. Also starring Antonio Banderas and Jonathan Pryce.	The first London performances of Tchaikovsky's classic by the Kirov with their legendary corps de ballet choreographed by Valonen. An ever-changing cast from willow starlet Diana Vishneva to New York City Ballet's premier danseur Igor Zelenky, with the orchestra of the Birmingham Royal Ballet.
critical view	Paul Taylor levitated into transports of delight. "Wonderfully joyous... take your family. Take other people's families. Take your street. Then go again." "Vibrantly alive... polish, heart, quality, attention to detail and mastery of sweeping good cheer," sang the <i>Mail</i> . "Hysterically funny and heart-rending... if you're not bowled over you must be such a guy as will not be moved by anything," exulted <i>The Telegraph</i> . "Seems even better than it did 14 years ago... a superb show," agreed <i>The Guardian</i> . "Is there a more exhilarating show on offer this yuletide? If so, I don't know it," declared <i>The Times</i> . "A night of high musical pleasure," cheered <i>The Standard</i> .	Adam Mars-Jones found it "glossy and superannuated", and Madonna gives no "sense of a performer transforming or transcending herself". "We're never remotely tempted to cry for her... a failure," rebuked <i>Time Out</i> . "Madonna earns her stardom... but watching Parker's huge film is a relentless experience," choked the <i>Standard</i> . "Something is wrong with a musical when you keep hoping everyone will shut up," noted <i>The Times</i> . "May not be profound but nor is it shallow," said <i>The Guardian</i> . "A miracle... Madonna's <i>Evita</i> is beautifully sung, forthrightly characterised and wonderfully moving... barely puts a foot wrong," eulogised the <i>FT</i> .	Louise Levine lavished praise on Asylumtova and the still "superb" corps de ballet but found the production disappointing. "No one on stage seems to act, yet we see a subtle concertante ensemble in which simple poses, light gesture, have a serene assurance," nodded the <i>FT</i> . "As a period piece, it holds a certain fascination," observed <i>The Times</i> . "Standards are slipping... overwhelmingly so in last night's underpowered presentation," chided the <i>Standard</i> . "At best Valonen's steps are off-the-bolt classroom stuff, and at worst they show a comic fondness for stomping dutifully along to the music's beat," admonished <i>The Guardian</i> .
on view	At the National Theatre, London SE1 (0171-928 2252).	Cert PG, 133 mins, at the Odeon West End. Selected previews from 26 Dec., nationwide from 3 Jan.	At the Coliseum, London WC2 (0171-632 8300) until 4 Jan.
our view	Three hours of thrilling, roof-raising, sensational theatre that leaves you giddy with pleasure.	Madonna is typecast as a woman who redefines self-love. Over amplified in every sense.	One for talent-spotters but not a patch on the Birmingham Royal Ballet production.

Well, hellooo!
to a cosier
class of camp

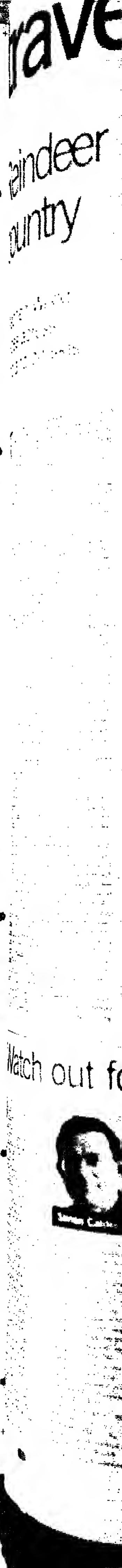
THEATRE Merry Wives of Windsor,
RSC, Stratford By Paul Taylor

Director Ian Judge and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* go together – in theory at least – like Fanny and Johnnie Cradock or FR and Queenie Leavis. With Judge and the major, truly searching plays in the Shakespeare canon, the match is often more a case of Newman and Baddiel. This is no longer as true as it was. His production, now transferred to the Barbican, of that difficult and demanding masterpiece *Troilus and Cressida* has its undoubted virtues. But with *Merry Wives*, just opened on the main stage at Stratford, Judge's sensibility – which tends towards cosy as opposed to radical camp – meets less opposition from the text.

There's a wonderful line in this play where Falstaff says, of his ducking in the Thames in the foul linen-hasket, "You may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking". And certainly my heart began to sink with some alacrity when the lights rose to reveal a cuties scale model in the background of Windsor Castle, rolling fields and scattered cottages. It is all so reminiscent of Judge inflicted on his depthless, Tourist Board *Twelfth Night*. The spectacle of tumbling children who look as if they've come straight off the covers of Elizabethan knitting-patterns does not do much to counteract foreboding. Nor does the early knowledge that, with elephantine predictability, Christopher Luscombe has been hired to perform what is virtually his only role – a prissy, fringe-worrying "Shut That Door" type. With the result that, as sure as night follows day, he actually trolls off, at the end, with the young man he has been tricked into marrying. Radical, what? Not if you have even the faintest memory of Cheek By Jowl's *As You Like It*.

Happily, there are performances here that keep forcing the heart to keep forcing the heart to

Booking: 01789 295623



travel & outdoors

Reindeer country

Stephen Wood
glides across
Lapland on skis

The first Friday of this month was a national holiday in Finland. This came both as a surprise to me – I had no idea I was arriving on the state's 79th birthday – and something of a relief: giving everyone on the plane a little bottle of sparkling wine in honour of a journalist from *The Independent* had seemed a bit excessive, until I gathered the pilot had in fact said "Independence Day". But my relief was tempered with anxiety. If it was a bank holiday weekend, wouldn't the winter sports area of Ylläs be very crowded?

The anxiety began to dissipate on the bus from the airport at Kittilä, in Lapland, the northernmost province of Finland. There was only one other passenger aboard and the road through the forest was so deserted that I idly started counting the vehicles that we passed coming the other way. Very idly. The bank holiday rush obviously hadn't pushed Lapland's population density much above its normal 2.1 people per square kilometre.

Lapland is deserted. In an area bigger than England and Wales put together it has a population about the size of Southampton's. True, there is a bit of a hiccup in December; that is when the British holidaymakers – an extraordinary 15,000 were expected this year – turn up to celebrate Christmas. The local resident, Santa Claus, is the big attraction, closely followed by the elves and, in the words of one British tour operator, "non-stop huskies, non-stop reindeer". Me, I was snowed on skis. Christmas could wait – I was going to spend the weekend cross-country skiing (for the first time) and trying the downhill slopes of Ylläs Fell.

Cross-country skiing is big in Lapland, for two reasons. First, the area is a bit short of mountains for downhill; Ylläs is the highest ski area in Finland, but the top of the fell is at only 718m. Second, there is snow on the ground from November to May, so jogging is out of the question. As is apparent from the grim concentration on the faces of skiers on the tracks around Akaslompolo – the main resort town for Ylläs – Finns regard cross-country primarily as a form of jogging. It is beautiful to watch, especially the traditional and misleadingly named "diagonal" style, in which the skis glide serenely forward in parallel.

It has almost nothing in common with downhill skiing: there's little excitement or challenge; familiar rituals such as queuing for ski-lifts have no part in it; and it is very easy to learn. I can vouch for the last because I am a largely self-taught cross-country skier. I was supposed to have a lesson on my first day, but a mix-up with bookings meant that I missed my slot. Instead the equipment-hire shop gave me some boots (exquisitely light and comfortable, with a lip at the front to click into the tiny, hinge-effect ski binding), a pair of skis (also very light), two long poles (for forward propulsion rather than balance) and a short run-down on technique. Then off I went, with the encouraging advice that although I would find it difficult on the pavement, it would get easier on the tracks.

I think they meant "in the tracks". The extensive network of municipal cross-country tracks around Akaslompolo is prepared by piste-bashing machines, which flatten down a central reservation and cut two grooves, like railway lines, down either side. There's an "up" line and a "down" line (in Finland you ski on the right); the central reservation is for climbing inclines and, for macho types who use the "skating" style, a brutal but more effective method which involves pushing off a diagonal kick ski in a kind of herringbone pattern.

Even on the tracks, there is a problem for beginners: still moving with an ungainly shuffle, you travel a lot more slowly than the experts, who glide. I felt like Thomas the Tank Engine on a TGV line. What was the correct cross-country etiquette? Was I supposed to make a hand-sign and pull over so that the group behind – I could hear them getting closer – might overtake? I chose to be rude and they struggled past on the central reservation. Quite soon, though, I got into the groove. When you think about it, cross-country is a nightmare of arm and leg co-ordination; when you stop thinking about it, it becomes completely natural. Your body slips into a laid-back, loping rhythm, which becomes utterly hypnotic. Push (on the kick ski) and glide (on the front); push (forcing the middle of the back ski down onto the snow) and glide (unweighting the other so that only the slip-waxed front and back touch the snow); push (using the pole) and glide (moving the pole forward as the gliding ski slows, and becomes the back ski).

There would, I knew, be a song whose rhythm would complement the machine-like movement; and in the end I found it. My advice, if you are thinking of going cross-country skiing, is to listen to Bob Marley's *Buffalo Soldier* a few times before the trip. I can offer no advice, however, on how to stop or turn on cross-country skis. All the man in the hire shop would say was that they were both difficult. That was true, but not helpful. I had to improvise; if you sit down, I found, you will eventually stop. Then you can decide which direction to take.

Gloom is undeniable – at least in Lapland in December. The sun never rises; as one Finn said to me, "It goes somewhere else." Daybreak comes at about 10.30am, and dusk follows four hours later. Even in the midday twilight, everything seems to be in black-and-white, under a grey sky.

This does have a lowering effect on one's mood: I took some Sibelius with me, to set an authentically Finnish atmosphere, but it seemed absurdly jolly for Lapland. The lack of light also squeezes the day down in a most confusing way. Right after lunch it feels like time for tea and crumpets – and then there are five hours of darkness to kill before suppertime. The few "daylight" hours provoke a clock-watching anxiety, even though most of the skiing facilities are floodlit. I did get in half a cross-country skiing lesson on day two, but I had to leave early to catch the last bus to Ylläs Fell – which departed at 11am.

That was a mistake. Although Akaslompolo is well inside the Arctic Circle, the weather there was wimpishly warm, never falling below -3C during the day. Up on Ylläs Fell, the temperature was no lower, but a howling wind effectively took it down, as I was told, to -15C. In thick mist, and with the wind whipping snow off the fell, the visibility was

so poor that I could hardly see my skis on the nursery-slope drag lift. On the T-bar up towards the summit it was cold enough to give me an instant headache – nature's way of telling you to get back to the restaurant. That ride, plus the 1,100m descent, cannot have taken more than about 10 minutes. But by the time I got back down, the eye-brow that had not been covered by my woolly hat was solid with ice. Between February and May, when the sun rises, Ylläs Fell is apparently a delightful place to ski; but I cannot recommend it on a freezing, misty day in December.

I thought I ought to ski the Mettäperkeleheenriinne, because I have never been down a run with such a long name. Happily, it was closed, so I was able to get back to the cosy cross-country tracks at Akaslompolo before nightfall. Push and glide, push and glide: beautiful.

I avoided Santa Claus, although his Akaslompolo residence was pointed out to me; I saw no elves, and no huskies. But on that last late afternoon, I did see some non-stop reindeer. I wish they had stopped, but they didn't. A group of them came slowly and timidly out of the forest behind me, crossed the ski track, and carried on to the frozen lake. To be honest, they looked too much like lumpy cattle for the moment to seem special – and anyway, until another cross-country skier came down a side track, I had no idea how special it was.

She had been to Lapland many times, she said, and this was only the second time she had seen wild reindeer. So I was lucky to see them? "You are very lucky," she said. "And so am I."

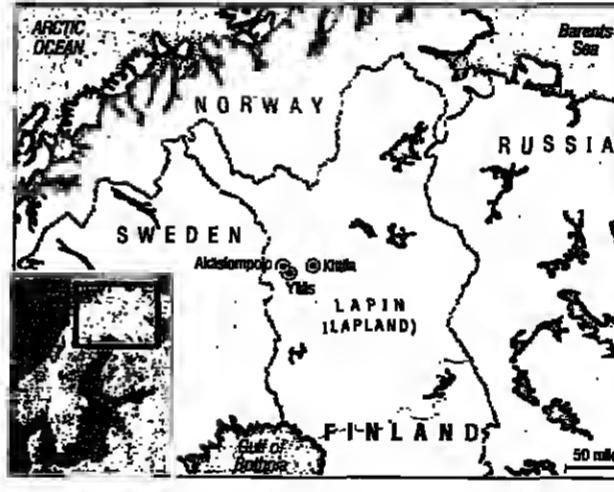
I went down to the edge of the lake to see if I could spot them again. But I couldn't see anything except shades of grey. The huge, flat sky perfectly matched the colour of the lake, with the strip of land on the other side just a slightly darker tone, one step down the Dulux colour chart. Then something peculiar happened. Perhaps it was the reindeer that caused it, or the affecting emotion of the woman to whom I had spoken; perhaps I had simply given in to the powerful, dark rhythm of the Arctic Circle. But suddenly the landscape and climate were no longer grim, just utterly and movingly awesome. Whatever, it wasn't the wind whipping off the lake that brought tears to my eyes.

Non-stop reindeer? Even in Finland wild herds are rarely seen

PHOTOGRAPH: HANS MADE/NETWORK

Lapland: ski basics

Stephen Wood stayed at the Akas Hotel in Akaslompolo, where a two/three person log cabin (with sauna) costs from £2,640 Finnish marks per week (about £350). He flew by Finnair, London-Helsinki-Kittila – round-trip from £252. The hire of cross-country skiing equipment costs FIM70 (a little over £9) per day; a downhill ski-pass at Ylläs Fell costs FIM90 (£12), boots and skis FIM100 (£13). No major tour operators offer ski packages to Ylläs, although they are expected to do so next season. Tailor-made packages



are available from Norvista (0171-409 7334); for example, an eight-day holiday in Ylläs, low season (5 January-14 February) costs 4048.

from £648, flight and half-board included (two sharing). Further information: Finnish Tourist Board (0171-839 4048)

noted for its vivacity and animation. The Norwegians – not themselves usually regarded as a load of laughs – apparently enjoy a genre of Finnish "jokes", based on the notion that Finns are depressing, uncommunicative, and heavy drinkers.

In one of them a couple are reunited after a long separation and go for a sauna together, taking some vodka with them. After a couple of hours' silent drinking, she asks him how he's been. He replies, after another couple of hours: "Did we come here to drink, or to drink?"

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Watch out for the discounts



If it's midwinter day, it must be time for the January sales. That is the logic that the travel industry is applying this weekend, in the hope that in between frantic shopping assaults on Marks & Spencer and Waterstone's, you and I will pop into a High Street travel agent and book a holiday.

The January sales push has begun ludicrously early this year, even by the standards of an industry that frequently seems to divert from reality. At my local branch of Thomas Cook, I noticed that the big "12 per cent" off notice was detachable, presumably so that an increased discount offered by rivals Going Places or Lumis Pöly can be matched without ripping down the entire window display.

What concerns me more than the premature sales push is that the travel industry seems unwilling to take note of public and political pressure. The Office of Fair Trading castigated the way that discounts are contingent on the purchase of over-priced insurance. Indeed, it was one reason

why the OFT referred the industry to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Yet if you glance at your local branch of Going Places today, you will see that the digits promising "12 per cent off" are about as big as this page. In contrast, you will need to press your nose against the window to see that the small print saying you have to buy the insurance is about the same size as this type. The standard insurance policy for a one-week holiday in Europe is £29.35.

Can I draw some more small print to your attention? This is the advertisement tucked in the back of *Travel Weekly*, one of the travel trade papers. This

offers people who work in travel an annual policy, valid worldwide, for just £25.

As it happens, I will be calling in at Going Places to book a holiday today. And if you took our advice to buy a Bounty bar, you should, too: vouchers for the best offer of the year, a straight £50 for buying one bar of chocolate-covered coconut, expires on New Year's Eve. I shall buy a day trip to Seville in February for £1.29 (with no mandatory insurance), and the agency will hand me £50-worth of pesetas. This proved to be such a good deal that a rival travel operator is rumoured to have gone out and bought a gross of Bounty bars and organised an entire sales conference based on the promotion.

These pages will strive to bring you the best travel confections on the coming year, but tomorrow I am going on holiday. I always aim to celebrate my birthday, which is in four days' time, in a different location. Last year I spent the day hitch-hiking through eastern Zimbabwe, ending in a hostel in Umtata with

certainly the least appetising Christmas dinner I have ever eaten.

This Christmas I have kept quiet about my plans, fearful that the trip is a sign of advancing years. If anyone asks, I just mutter something about the Dominican Republic. Keep it quiet, but I am actually going on a Caribbean cruise. The reason (besides the wish to have a decent Christmas dinner) is strictly financial: a week of backpacking through southern Africa cost me a straight £1,000 including flights. A Thomson cruise through the Leeward Islands actually cost £100 less. I shall tell you how they compare on 4 January. Meanwhile, may all your travels at Christmas and beyond be fun and fulfilling, and may you never need to claim on that over-priced insurance.

In the first *Independent* Magazine of 1997, you will read a travel special that includes a story by another birthday boy: Tony Wheeler. The founder of Lonely Planet Publications celebrated his 50th two days

ago. He will be writing on his adopted home town of Melbourne for the Magazine, as part of an alphabetical trip around the globe from Antarctica to Zanzibar.

The world has changed considerably since Mr Wheeler first wrote *Across Asia on the Cheap* in 1973, which included the following exchange at the Iran-Afghanistan border:

"How long have you been here?", we asked. "About six hours."

"Good grief – what have you been doing all that time?"

"Blowing a little dope with the customs."

The marks of true celebrities are that their 50th birthdays should be a matter of note – and that they should be rumoured to have died. Both of these apply to Paul McCartney, and also to Mr Wheeler; he is supposed to have perished under the wheels of an Indian bus. But yesterday morning he was alive and well, and has almost forgiven his staff for their specially designed birthday card: a book cover entitled *Tony Wheeler: a Rough Guide*.

Send just £2.75 plus p&p for this top brand film (suggested retail price £3.49) and your photos will be developed and printed free of charge.

Each colour film costs £2.75 plus 50p towards postage and packing for up to two films and an extra 50p per two films ordered thereafter. Why not order for the whole family?

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Don't have a car? You've been sleighted

Santa Claus is coming to town? Not on public transport, he's not. Simon Calder surveys the trains and boats and planes over Christmas – and offers the chance to 'name that tune' and win a festive prize.

prize.
Spot the song titles
and win the new
'Rough Guide to
Rock'. Contained in
the following story
are the titles of 16
Christmas hits,
many of them naff.
If you can spot
them all, you could
be in the running
for a free copy of
this new book,
which retails at
£17.99.

"I wish," crooned Roy Wood of Wizard, "it could be Christmas every day." He cannot be much of a traveller. Were it permanently 25 December, then the transport map of Britain would look decidedly bleak. If a spaceman came travelling to the UK on Christmas Day, he would assume that almost no one went anywhere without a car.

Suppose Mr Wood wanted to venture from his home town of Birmingham to Wolverhampton to deliver some mistletoe and wine, and say merry Christmas, everybody, to his pals from the band Slade. He'd better watch out - not because Santa Claus is coming to town, but because the last northbound train from New Street is at 9.05pm on 24 December. The first one back is not until 6am, two-and-a-half days later. This story is repeated on almost all UK rail services on both Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The honourable exception is the Gatwick Express, which is making a late bid for bargain of the year. From 7am to 5.30pm on 25 December, trains will run every half-hour - and passengers travel free.

Midlands musos are better served on the buses. National Express is breaking its usual Christmas duck (or should that be turkey?), with a 25 December bus from Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Coventry to Heathrow and Gatwick airports. Another coach will link Swansea, Cardiff and Bristol with the pair of London airports. And that, as far as National Express is concerned, is it. On 26 December, a limited service of buses will run based around London and Birmingham. When Wizzard first hit the charts, Roy Wood could have relied upon the London Underground network to whisk him around the capital on 25 December, but the Tube closes altogether now. After 10pm on Christmas Eve, the Tube will be silent, night and day, until around 8am on Boxing Day.

A few London buses are running, including a free service, number 208, between Lewisham and Bromley. Unlike last Christmas, the Transport and General Workers' Union has brought its festive 732 service between Edgware Station and Cricklewood Broadway to a full stop.

A black and white photograph of a London Underground train at night. The train is decorated with a pattern of stars. On the side, it has the number '732' and the word 'Cricklewood'. On the front, there is a large advertisement for 'Panasonic' featuring a smiling face. The background shows a city skyline with lit buildings.

© 2019 VINTAGE JONATHAN ANSTEY

minutes to travel north from here) and says that motorists are more prone to stop on 25 December than on any other day.

I was born on Christmas Day, so the prospect of flying down to Rio (oo Varig at 0pm) appeals rather more. The price I was quoted was £650, but Mary's boy child would travel for one-tenth of this until His second birthday.

Eurolstar is running oo services from Waterloo and Ashford to Brussels and Paris on 25 December. The reason, says the company, is that there are oo connecting transport links on the British side.

It'll be looely this Christmas-down at the P&O terminal in Dover. But in the Stena

To reach Heathrow airport by public transport looks rather tougher than travelling by donkey to Bethlehem. The A1 and M25 ticket prices coming from Victoria and P&O terminal in Dover. But in the Stena Line cross-Channel schedules I've been studying, I saw three ships come sailing in - and three sailing back to Calais. A day-trip ticket costs £1.

2 Airbuses are running from Victoria and Waterloo respectively. These buses step into Christmas mode around 6am and step out again shortly before 3pm in time for a late coach. With a seven-hour wait, I could be doing a lot of walking in the air terminal. The Gatwick-Heathrow link (6am-7pm) completes the airport loop, and enables trip ticket costs £1.

To flee the transport inertia of Britain in December, stay in France - where you will find many trains and buses running normally, the sort of commitment to public transport I believe in. Father Christmas, though, might be tempted to ask: "Do they know it's Christmas?"

*Eurostar: 0345 303030.
London Transport: 0171-222 1234.
National Rail Enquiries: 0345 484950.
National Express: 0990 808080.*

How to enter: Hidden in the story are 16 song titles. Your task is to identify them all. Write them on a piece of paper, or tear out/photocopy this story and highlight them. Then complete this sentence: "The best book to give Santa when he comes to town is the 'Rough Guide to -', in as many words as you like. It could be an existing book - such as 'Turkey', both the home country of St Nicholas and his favourite dinner - or an imaginary one, such as the Rough Guide to Lapland and Chimney-limbing.

The rules

1. "I wish it could be Christmas every day" counts, but "Flying down to Rio", and "I saw three ships" don't as neither were Christmas hits. And don't even think about "Waterloo", "Victoria", "Stop", or any other one-word wonders.
2. Punctuation should be ignored, so beware of things. Like this.
3. No Robson & Jerome songs or Andrew Lloyd Webber compositions are knowingly included, or comprise acceptable answers.
4. Don't worry if you can't get all 16; if you have a jolly good try and can think of a neat tie-break, you will be in the running.
5. The competition is open to employees of Newspaper Publishing plc and their relatives. This may save on postage.
6. The travel editor's decision is final. Only entertaining correspondence will be entered into.

**Send your entry to
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Travel, The
Independent, 1 Canada
Square, London E14
5DL, to arrive by 6
January.**

The 10 best entries will be sent a copy of the *Rough Guide to Rock*, an up-to-the minute compendium covering more than 1,000 bands and artists.

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The air is
so polluted
you can
smell it

Photo:
Geraint
Lewis

Two Kraków hours and counting

• By Brian Patten

One evening in late November I checked into a hotel in Kraków, a city I'd not visited since 1984 when Poland was still a nation suppressed by the Soviet Union. I was on my way next morning to Katowice, in the Silesia region of the country, the industrial south, where blackened city merges into blackened city and the air is so polluted you can taste as well as smell it.

If you find time, write about Kraków, I was asked. How? I've hardly there on this trip. OK, snapshots then.

I'm up early and pull the thin curtains apart. It's either just getting light, or the thick blanket of cloud is keeping the daylight at bay. The old city begins somewhere beyond the park across the road. A blue tram rattles in one direction, a yellow tram in another. By a car-park an old couple are setting up a stall selling pretzels.

I have two hours at the most, so it's out across the tramlines to the Planty, a strip of park that surrounds medieval Kraków. It has replaced the city walls, torn down by the invading Austrian army at the beginning of the 19th century.

Winter is some weeks on here. An avenue of bare trees stands out black in the morning mist, there's an abundance of rooks and pigeons, a solitary woman walks three Pekinese dogs – one so startled it looks like a ball of soaking fur moving among the rain puddles. On a low hoarding at the side of the narrow park

posters advertise art exhibitions and Kung Fu demonstrations. On a smoke-blackened stone plinth at an intersection of paths is a bust of Michael Palucki, an all-but-forgotten rebel general from the 18th century.

I'm heading for Rynek Główny, the main square in the old city. My only point of reference is Hotel Polski, where I stayed years ago with a guide who panicked every time I slipped away. I find the hotel just inside the remnants of one of the few remaining bits of the old city wall around the corner from Ulica Florianska. Things have changed.

Florianska leads down to the main square and while it's not typical of all the shopping streets of Kraków – and in other circumstances hardly worth writing about – it does present a microcosm of what's taking place. At the top of Florianska, once a pretty drab place, there's now a McDonald's. It's to this icon of American culture that hordes of children are bussed in from the surrounding villages for special treats.

Suddenly a wonderful sight. An amazingly bright crocodile of children in coloured bobble-hats and bright parka jackets, like a living stream of Smarties, flows past me. It's a wonderful sight not because they are heading to the hamburger shop, but because this chattering explosion of colour is the first generation of Polish children born free after so many years of occupation.



Further down Florianska, between the Tourist Information Office and a shop selling furs, a man is kneeling, the little cardboard box in front of him falling apart in the drizzle. Head bowed as if in penance, a look of practised sorrow on his face, he holds the stump of his left arm. While managing to remain absolutely immobile, when a nun walks past him he shifts. Across the street, outside a shop called Paradise with its window display of distinctly English tweedy jackets and

Getting there: the only scheduled flights from the UK to Kraków are on the Polish airline LOT. At present there are three flights each week from Heathrow (on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays), but frequency will increase from next spring. The fare through specialist agents such as Fregata Travel (0171-451 7000) is £213.20 including tax, which allows you to return from Warsaw instead of Kraków if you wish.

Further information: Polish National Tourist Office, First Floor, Remu House, 310-312 Regent Street, London W1R 5AJ (0171-580 8811).

Mariacki Church is one of the most beautiful in Poland. At the southern portal are iron boldfasts, cages in which sinners were kept on view, a more sophisticated version of the English village stocks. Outside one of the two entrances to the church – the one marked "For Prayer Only" – several Romanian gypsies, begging.

In the backstreets are other smaller churches and convents. In the doorway of one convent belonging to Dominican Sisters, a man in a blue beret kneels, praying, before a coloured poster advertising a concert to celebrate the 750th anniversary of St Salome, a local nun. Across the road on the walls of Kościół NMP Szczęsnego – Our Lady of Snow – death notices flutter in the wind, some ripped and blown into the gutter. Someone has rested a ladder against a statue of the Virgin and is climbing up it to polish the fine gold stars beaded to her halo. A few minutes away,

above one of the doors of the Theological Academy in Kanonicza Street, is a painting of Christ and the money-lenders. The door opens and out walk a group of young priests. Christ, in a painted image above them, is dressed in almost identical theological garb.

Between the numerous churches in the medieval city are other huge studded doors, dark vestibules and narrow passageways. It can be disorientating, because as often as not these lead into tiny courtyards and up stairs to rooms in which

you are just as likely to find a café or bar as a religious office.

Heading back to the main square I hear music, low and sad. I trace it to the octagonal turret below the crown-like spire of St Mariacki's Church where a small window has opened and a tiny figure is standing playing a trumpet. The window closes, and a few moments later another opens, and the trumpeter is back again.

In a café, the mystery of the trumpeter is explained to me. It seems Tartars came to conquer Kraków in the 16th century. A trumpeter, knowing they were approaching the city, played as loud as he could to warn people of the invasion, but before he finished playing he received an arrow through his throat. Although the music is played on the hour every hour, once a day, at noon, it is left unfinished. It's a romantic legend befitting a romantic city.

"The soul in Kraków but the money is in Warsaw," says a local photographer, "and Kraków is more beautiful". I agree. Mine is a winter view of Kraków: the trees are bare and the rain cold. I've arrived in the wrong season so can't report on green avenues or squares crowded with flower-sellers. Still, if you've been to Prague then Kraków is the ideal follow-up – especially if you stay for longer than two hours.

Brian Patten's latest collection of poems, *'Armada'*, is published by Flamingo Books at £5.99.

Eastern winters of content

Bratislava and Sofia are still thawing from the Cold War. By Simon Calder

Checkpoint Charlie at dawn was a rather more exciting gateway to Eastern Europe than Victoria Coach Station is today. Seven years ago you had to spend weeks filling forms, acquiring visas and plotting how to satisfy (or transgress) arcane currency regulations. It was a venture into the unknown. The process of visiting Eastern Europe was like playing an extra in a monochrome spy movie; and sometimes, if you strayed across the ill-defined line between international comradeship and potential espionage, you could be given an unwelcome speaking part in the Cold War drama. I spent an uncomfortable 24 hours in the company of Ceausescu's Securitate in Bucharest after a spot of careless photography.

Now, the faceless bureaucrats have been replaced by flashy entrepreneurs, and black marketeers have turned into stalwarts of the business community. Thanks to the miracles of modern marketing, you can catch a bus from Victoria Coach Station to Prague, Warsaw or even the Ukraine for under £100 return.

The thrill of treading in truly alien territory has evaporated, but in its place is the joy of being able to explore freely a part of Europe kept in suspended animation for 40 years.

Seven winters ago, the Soviet empire

waslinking into metropolitan life. The new nation is still trying to purge the detritus of Soviet domination such as the Slovak National Uprising Bridge, perched like a wanton alien astride the Danube. It is a piece of decidedly uncivil engineering, an equilateral triangle on an absurd scale. But three-quarters of the Old Town has survived, comprising a startling muddle of Gothic, Baroque and Ottoman buildings.

Organising your mission: fly to Vienna for around £160 return through discount agent, then take the connecting bus direct from Vienna airport across the border to Bratislava.

Sofia
Most of us have a pretty good idea of what eastern European capitals are like. They are all ringed with standard-issue graceless and faceless apartment blocks, while their centres are architectural battlegrounds where office blocks – the bureaucrats within insulated by grubby net curtains – have smothered any semblance of style and history.

And Sofia must be worst of all, I thought. Bulgaria was the last of the Soviet satellites to embrace democracy, and its former leader Todor Zhivkov even toyed with the idea of turning his state into

the 16th republic of the USSR. But Sofia is the great, uncelebrated eastern capital. It specialises in boulevards, seemingly dozens of them, each broader than the last and graced with slender plane trees.

Most of the city's landmarks are strewn casually around the Vitosha Boulevard axis. The mix of the humdrum and the historic has a certain charm, as if you have stumbled into a movie studio lot where the sets for a Fassbinder-esque tale of urban angst have been jumbled up with a middle European fairy story.

The National Museum is a good place to get a political fix on the city. Specifically, wander around the back of this Italianate palace to the patch of wasteground where the statues of those who have fallen from favour are stacked, undignified and unkempt. The building which does the most damage to Sofia's skyline is the one where the statues were commissioned: the former Communist Party Headquarters, a spectacularly Stalinist structure which casts a long and still-threatening winter shadow over the city. It has since become a cinema. *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is showing soon.

Intruding the Balkans: Sofia is served from London by Balkan Bulgarian (0171-637 7637) and British Airways (0345 222111).



Photo:
Simon
Calder

Christmas guide to the arts, entertainment 21-27 December

Film on release

ACTS OF LOVE (18) Dennis Hopper is nicely understated in his first real romantic lead, in this small-town reworking of *Lolita*.

THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO (U) Patchy live-action version of the children's classic.

ALASKA (PG) Kids' eco-thriller with two children trekking through Alaskan snowdrifts to rescue their injured father.

AMERICAN BUFFALO (15) Dustin Hoffman stars in David Mamet's study of small-time crooks planning a heist.

ANTONIA'S LINE (15) (subtitles) Oscar-nominated female drama, spanning five decades.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS (15) Breezy, bitter-sweet romantic comedy about a group of thirtysomething bitches.

LE BONHEUR (EST DANS LE PRE (12) (subtitles) Underwhelming French drama about the cost of a foot-soldier factory who finds a new joie de vivre. With a cameo appearance by Eric Cantona.

BRASSED OFF (15) Moving drama about the decline of a mining community, as seen through the eyes of the local brass band.

BREAKING THE WAVES (18) Emily Watson gives a towering performance in Lars von Trier's harrowing epic, set on the Scottish coast.

CHAIN REACTION (12) Brainless and confusing action movie, with Keanu Reeves discovering fusion and setting off a chain of chases and explosions.

A CHINESE GHOST STORY (15) Loopy martial-arts ghost story with effervescent humour and eerie effects.

COURAGE UNDER FIRE (15) Gulf War drama, with Denzel Washington trying to decide whether chopper pilot Meg Ryan should be awarded a posthumous medal for bravery.

THE CRAFT (15) Andrew Fleming's black teen movie about high-schoolers.

CRIMETIME (18) A TV-style serial killer gets tips from a real psychopath in this disappointing thriller from George Sluizer.

THE COW: CITY OF ANGELS (18) Hollwood sequel, with Vincent Perez.

THE DAY OF THE BEAST (18) (adults) Gory, off-target black comedy from Spain.

THE DAY THE SUN TURNED COLD (12) (subtitles) A boy acomes his mother of killing his father in this sombre thriller from Hong Kong.

DRACULA: DEAD AND LOVING IT (PG) Mel Brooks's depressingly tritely parody.

DRAGONHEART (PG) Winsome of SFX-laden bokum.

THE EIGHTH DAY (PG) Clever Fresh fable about a Down's syndrome sufferer.

ELLA (U) Gwyneth Paltrow is the irresistible matchmaker in the latest *Athena* adaptation.

EWAA (PG) Alan Parker's film of the Ti Rita/Andrew Lloyd Webber musical. The worldly and ultimately sick Eva Peron, is played with panache by Madonna, but the film lacks emotion.

FEAR (18) Mark Wahlberg fails to convince as a psychopathic Casanova in this sick but grim, teen-date thriller.

FEELING MINNESOTA (18) Lumpen, loud thriller, with Keanu Reeves as a driver who hooks up with his brother's wife, a femme fatale played by Cameron Diaz.

THE FIRST WIVES CLUB (PG) Middle-aged women exact revenge on their husbands in a popular but flimsy comedy.

FLED (PG) Incompetent re-run of *The Deafman*.

GABRIEL (NC) (subtitles) Good-looking but emotionally vacuous piece of Iranian folklore.

THE GLIMMER MAN (18) Willess Steven Seagal vehicle.

A GOOFY MOVIE (15) Goofy does some father-son bonding.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS (15) Jodie Foster directs this chilly, unsympathetic comedy about a dysfunctional family.

INDEPENDENCE DAY (12) Aliens invade in the over-hyped sci-fi blockbuster.

I SHOT ANDY WARHOL (18) Liev Schreiber steals the show as violently nihilistic feminist, Valerie Solanas, in this meditation on Warhol's 1968 Factory.

THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU (12) Schllock adaptation of HG Wells' sci-fi classic, with Marlon Brando, Val Kilmer and David Thewlis.

JACK (PG) Abominable comedy from Francis Coppola, with Robin Williams playing a 10-year-old boy.

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH (U) Fairytale adaptation of the children's classic.

JANE EYRE (PG) Zeffirelli's dull and unsentimental interpretation of Bronte's novel.

JINGLE ALL THE WAY (PG) Amic's race to buy his son the season's top toy in this unamusing and hypocritical Christmas comedy.

JUDE (15) Perceptive take on Hardy's tragic last novel, with Christopher Eccleston and Kate Winslet.

KANSAS CITY (15) Alman's mature and inventive study of 1940s low-life desperados.

THE LAST OF THE HIGH KINGS (15) Engaging Irish slice-of-life comedy with a light touch.

THE LAST SUPPER (NC) Grimly emotive AIDS movie in which the camera never leaves the room of the dying protagonist.

THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT (15) Vulgar but thrilling action adventure, with Geena Davis as an All-American woman and amorous assassin.

MICHAEL COLLINS (15) Liam Neeson is the heroic visionary and terrorist in Neil Jordan's historical drama.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (PG) Lydgate adaptation of Adrian Noble's RSC production.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE (PG) Cult TV series becomes state-of-the-art spy adventure, starring Tom Cruise.

MUR RELIABLE (15) Aussie comedy set in the 1960s, which overreaches both credibility and sentimentality.

MULTIPOLITY (12) Internationally inspired dancing comedy, starring Michael Keaton, from different aspects of the modern male.

THE NUTTY PROFESSOR (12) Remake of the 1963 comedy classic sees Eddie Murphy as the fat professor who invents a potion to make him into a little lothario.

ONE FINE DAY (15) (subtitles) Sequel to the original *One Fine Day*, with Eddie Murphy as the fat professor who invents a potion to make him into a little lothario.

ONE DALMATIAN (15) Whiter John Hughes introduces some *Hairspray* motifs into this live-action remake of Disney's 1961 animation. Sharp design and a wonderful pantomime villain in Glenn Close's Cruella De Vil compensates for what is otherwise a redundant exercise.

THE PILLBOW BOOK (18) Ecstatic and calligraphic from Peter Greenaway, as the brilliant Vivian Wu goes in search of things that make the heart beat faster.

IL POSTINO (U) (subtitles) Touching Neapolitan romance about a postman's friendship with exiled Chilean poet Pablo Neruda.

THE ROCK (15) Sean Connery and Nicolas Cage as the first men to break into Alcatraz.

THE SPY WHO LOVED ME (1999) (PG) Ian Fleming's final James Bond novel, with Pierce Brosnan as the suave agent 007.

THE TITANIC (18) A TV-style serial killer gets tips from a real psychopath in this disappointing thriller from George Sluizer.

THE COW: CITY OF ANGELS (18) Hollwood sequel, with Vincent Perez.

THE DAY OF THE BEAST (18) (adults) Gory, off-target black comedy from Spain.

THE BRAVE (15) Andrew Fleming's black teen movie about high-schoolers.

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The

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West End

101 DALMATIANS (U)

Virgin Film Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen One Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Two Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Three Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Four Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Five Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Six Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Seven Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Eight Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Nine Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Ten Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Eleven Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Twelve Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Thirteen Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Fourteen Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Fifteen Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Sixteen Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Seventeen Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Eighteen Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Nineteen Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Twenty Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

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Screen Forty-four Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Forty-five Sat-Sun 1pm-4pm

Screen Forty-six Sat

Christmas guide to church services & events 21-27 December

These are the church services for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day:

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL: 25 Dec 8am HC; 10am Matins, Ireland in P; 11am Sung Eucharist, Miss brevi in B flat (Mozart), The Archbishop; 3.15pm Evensong, Howells in G.

YORK MINSTER: 24 Dec 4pm Nine Lessons and Carols, 25 Dec 8am, 8.35am HC; 10am Sung Eucharist, Miss brevi in (Mozart), The Archbishop; 11.30am Matins, Britton in E and C, The Dean; 4pm Evensong, St Paul's service (Howells).

BIRMINGHAM CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30am Midnight Mass, Miss verbum coro (Jeffcoat), The Provost; 25 Dec 8am Morning Prayer, 9.15am HC; 11am Choral Matins, Kelly in C, The Right Rev Mark Sancier; 4pm Evening Prayer.

BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Eucharist, Mass of the quiet hour (Okopko), Canon David Gallic; 25 Dec 8am HC; 9.15am HC; 11am Choral Eucharist, Kelly in C, The Right Rev Mark Sancier; 4pm Evening Prayer.

GUILDFORD CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.45pm Midnight Eucharist, Dixit Maria mass (Hastler), The Sub-Dom; 25 Dec 8am HC, Canon Dr Maureen Palmer; 9.45am Sung Eucharist, Miss brevi in C (Mozart), The Bishop; 11.30am Matins, Stamford in B flat, The Dean; 4pm Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols.

LEICESTER CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Miss brevi in C (Mozart), The Bishop; 25 Dec 7.40am Morning Prayer; 8am HC; 10.30am Choral Matins, On this day earth shall ring (Stewart), The Provost.

LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Mass, Schubert in O, The Rev Alan Smith; 25 Dec 8am HC; 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Schubert in G, The Bishop; 5.30pm Evening Prayer.

LINCOLN CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Eucharist and Blessing of the City, The Chancellor; 25 Dec 8am HC with Carols and Station at the City; 9.30am Sung Eucharist, Miss Sancti Nicolai (Haydn), The Bishop; 11.30am Matins, Stamford in B flat, The Dean; 12.30pm HC; 3.45pm HC, College regale (Howells).

BRADFORD CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm First Communion of Christmas, In the bleak mid-winter (Darke), The Provost; 25 Dec 8am HC; 10.15am HC, The Bishop.

BURY ST EDMUNDS CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Oldroyd in D; 8am HC; 10am Sung Eucharist, Mozart in C, The Bishop; of Dunwich; 11.45am HC; 3pm Choral Evensong, Blow in F transposed.

CARLISLE CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Eucharist, Canon David Weston; 25 Dec 10.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon in C and F, The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

CHELMFORD CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Mass, Miss brevi in C (Mozart); 25 Dec 8am HC; 9.30am Sung Eucharist, Miss ad presepe (Malcolm).

OXFORD, Christ Church: 25 Dec 10am Matins, Canon in E, The Bishop; 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Miss brevi in F (Mozart), The Dean; 6pm Evensong.

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.45pm First Eucharist of Christmas, Messa de minuti (Chapman), The Very Rev Derek Watson; 25 Dec 8am HC; 10am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Bishop; 11.30am Family Service for Christmas Morning, Canon June Osborne; 3pm Evensong and Procession, College regale (Wood).

PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.45pm Solemn Eucharist, Little organ mass (Haydn), The Bishop; 25 Dec 8am HC; 9.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Precentor; 11am Sung Eucharist, Darke in F, The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Blessing of the Crib and First Eucharist of Christmas, Miss Sancti Joannis de Deo (Haydn), The Provost; 25 Dec 8am HC; Canon Bob Langley; 9.30am Sung Eucharist, Miss ad presepe (Malcolm).

WORCESTER CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Eucharist, Canon David Thomas; 25 Dec 9.30am Family Eucharist, The Archdeacon; 11am Sung Eucharist, Miss brevi in F (Mozart), The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

PORTSMOUTH CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Mass, Schubert in G, The Precentor; 25 Dec 8am HC; 9.30am Sung Eucharist, Miss brevi in G, Canon Christopher Smith; 25 Dec 8am HC; 10am Morning Prayer; 10.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Bishop; 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon in A, The Dean; 3pm Evensong and Procession of the Christmas Crib, Stanford in A.

SHEFFIELD CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Eucharist, Miss brevi in (Mozart), Canon Christopher Smith; 25 Dec 8am HC; 10am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Bishop; 3pm Evensong.

RIPON CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Eucharist, Jackson in G, Canon Peter Marshall; 25 Dec 8am HC, Canon Michael Glamville-Smith; 9.30am Sung Eucharist, Jackson in G, The Bishop; 11.30am Matins, Britton in C; The Dean; 12.30pm Sung Eucharist, The Rev David Muriel; 4pm Evensong with Cards round the Crib, Canon Keith Punston.

DURHAM CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm First Eucharist of Christmas, Ireland in C, Canon Tony Chesserian; 25 Dec 10.45am Sung Eucharist with Cards, Stanford in G, The Bishop.

COVENTRY CATHEDRAL: 25 Dec 7.40am Morning Prayer; Sam Communion; 10.30am Cathedral Eucharist, Miss brevi Sancti Joannis de Deo (Haydn); 3.30pm Evening Prayer at the Crib.

DERBY CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm First Eucharist of Christmas, Ireland in C, Canon Tony Chesserian; 25 Dec 10.45am Sung Eucharist with Cards, Stanford in G, The Bishop.

ST ALBANS CATHEDRAL: 25 Dec 8am HC; 10am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Bishop; 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon in C, The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

WORCESTER CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Eucharist, Canon David Thomas; 25 Dec 9.30am Family Eucharist, The Archdeacon; 11am Sung Eucharist, Miss brevi in F (Mozart), The Bishop; 12.30pm Sung Eucharist, The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

WAKEFIELD CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.15pm Procession to the Crib and Mid-



night Mass, Messe de minuit (Chapman), The Bishop; 25 Dec 8am HC; Canon in F, Canon Christopher Smith; 1pm Sung Eucharist, Miss Sancti Joannis de Deo (Haydn), The Provost; 25 Dec 8am HC; Canon Bob Langley; 9.30am Sung Eucharist, Miss ad presepe (Malcolm).

ST ALBANS CATHEDRAL: 25 Dec 8am HC; 10am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Bishop; 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon in C, The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

ST DAVIDS CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm First Eucharist of Christmas, Miss Sancti Joannis de Deo (Haydn), The Bishop; 25 Dec 8am HC; 10am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Bishop; 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon in C, The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Mass of Christmas, Messa de minuti (Chapman), The Bishop; 25 Dec 8am HC; 9.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Bishop; 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon in C, The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

GLASGOW CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.15pm Christmas Eve Service, A Christmas carol (Darke), The Very Rev Dr W.J. Morris; 25 Dec 11am Christmas Day Service, Stanford in B flat, The Dean; 4.15pm Evening Prayer.

NEWPORT CATHEDRAL: 24 Dec 11.30pm First Eucharist of Christmas, Miss Sancti Joannis de Deo (Haydn), The Bishop; 25 Dec 8am HC; 10am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Bishop; 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon in C, The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI CHURCH: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Mass, Miss Sancti Joannis de Deo (Haydn), The Bishop; 25 Dec 8am HC; 10am Sung Eucharist, Canon Nicola (Haydn), The Bishop; 11.30am Sung Eucharist, Canon in C, The Dean; 4pm Evensong.

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ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI CHURCH: 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Mass, Miss Sancti Joannis de Deo (Haydn), The Bishop; 25 Dec 8am HC; 10

Christmas guide to the best in walks 21-27 December

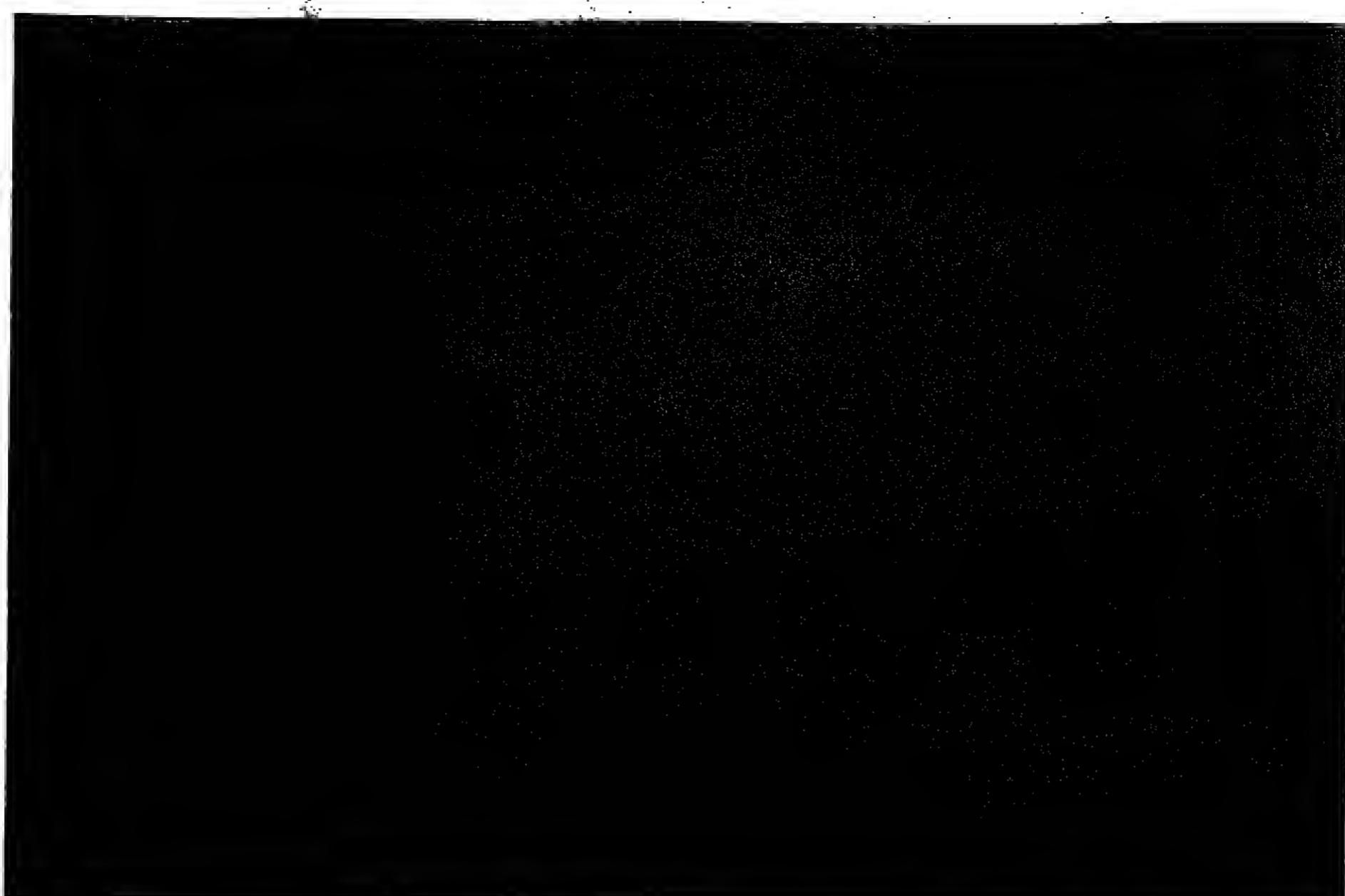
Landscapes that come alive

Richard D North rambles in artistic landscapes – and lists country walks for the energetic

In the next few days, many of us will do more walking in the countryside than in the rest of the year combined. It's the idleness and the gluttony, and the sheer expanse of empty days, that encourage it. We want to stretch our limbs and refresh the eye, and the Ramblers' Association is there to help us, wherever we live. For Londoners, though, the aching feet might just as well be had from walking round the Tate, the Royal Academy, the Wallace Collection or the National Gallery: all have shows which brilliantly delight, and show us how we came to love the countryside beyond the city's walls.

It's a curiosity that until recently the British were too modest to notice or declare that their landscape is the loveliest in the world. They knew, of course, that the nation was an aesthetic and artistic periphery. The civilised British person has always known well enough that we were the best governed, the most inventive, the most thoughtful and perhaps the only honest people in Europe (itself the only place which could possibly matter). We might even be capable of quite decent religious feeling. But for matters of the heart, for romance, sensibility, and for things to delight the eye, we went abroad. For centuries, our footsteps have taken us to Venice, Florence or Paris. The artistic and intellectual fallout from the Grand Tour is the subject of a show at the Tate, and is cleverly charted in a new book whose title says it all: *Transports: Travel, Pleasure and Imaginative Geography: 1600-1830*. (At £35, it will burn up a couple of book tokens; at 6½ lb, don't put it in your knapsack.)

It was the work of Claude Lorrain (one included at the Royal Academy's heavenly show of drawings) which made the leaders of taste in 17th- and 18th-century England suddenly see that their own estates and environs might quite easily be envisaged as suitable subjects even for such a genius. Men such as Alexander Cozens and his son John (patronised by the Her-



fordshire landowner and proto-conservationalist Richard Payne Knight) parlayed Claude into Englishness, as the Royal Academy examples of all three help explain. During the National Gallery's brilliant Claude show a couple of years ago, it was Paul Johnson who pointed out that no tree has ever grown the way Claude painted it. None. With a little tinkering, the English landscape could be made worthy of Claude

himself. No one used the words, but habitat management was also born.

Following the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (included at the RA) and other northern Continentals, there was also a sort of visionary quality of which I'm suspicious, though it comes out well in Samuel Palmer's works (a lovely one illuminates the RA's show). Thank God, we were seldom neurotic in our love of nature.

A lovely show at the Na-

tional Gallery helps us see something else about the growth in landscape feeling. Whilst his contemporaries and most of his customers would not have understood quite why, Rubens was drawn to paint landscape, mostly for his own delight. He was, as the *Making and Meaning: Rubens's Landscapes* catalogue explains, building on a Flemish tradition dating from the early 16th century.

A lovely show at the Nat-

Now it is the almost furtively wild – the feral – surroundings of any town, whether Newbury (sense the canalside quiet while you may), the water meadows of Sudbury, in Suffolk, or Cricklade in Wiltshire, which many of us walk in most and love most. True, Rubens's scenes are on a larger scale (I see the tamer bits of Herefordshire in them), but they are of flat and featureless countryside. It was this work which inspired Constable, so it was through Flanders that we saw Suffolk as lovely. That ultimate English icon, *The Haywain*, was directly inspired by Rubens. I'd rather see the connection between the genius of Flanders and Constable's fine (he called it "rugged") drawing of a humdrum river near Petersfield. In any case, the English love-affair with great painting, and our preparedness to learn from it, gave us our understanding that nowhere on earth was granted such a compact variety of landscape, from the grand to the familiar. And both the art and the land remain astonishingly available to us.

The Tate Gallery, The Grand Tour: the Lure of Italy in the 18th Century. Until 5 Jan. Mon-Sat, 10am-5.30pm, Sun 2.30-5pm. Closed 24-26 Dec, open all over New Year. Adults £5, concessions £3.50

The Royal Academy, Piccadilly. From Mantegna to Picasso, Drawings from the Thaw Collection. Until 23 Jan. Open 10am-6pm daily, closed 24-26 Dec, open all over New Year. To avoid queuing, book tickets in advance (0171 494 5676). Adults £5, concessions £3.50

The Wallace Collection, Manchester Square, W1. A vast jumble of stunning art. Open 10am-5pm, Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun. Closed 24-26 Dec, closed January 1. Free

The National Gallery, Trafalgar Square. Making and Meaning: Rubens's Landscapes. Opening as for the rest of the gallery. Mon-Sat 10am-6pm Mon-Sat (10am-6pm Wednesday) and 12pm-6pm Sun. Closed 24-26 Dec, Jan. Free.

From Avon to Wrexham via a pub or two

England

AVON (see Gloucester)

BEDFORDSHIRE
26 Dec: CLOPHILL, 10.30am, The Green, 6 mls, D. 01582 74342(d), 27 Dec LUTON, 10am, Caddington village green, by shops, 4½ mls, 01582 505808.

MILTON BRYAN, 10am, church, 6 mls, 01582 743412(d), 01462 672906(e).

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
26 Dec: WOBURN TOWN, 11am, Woburn Park car park, 3½ mls, 01628 22991.

CHESTER
26 Dec: FRODSHAM, 2pm, Aston Arms, Mill Lane, off A56, 5 mls, D. 01928 575726.

LITTLE Budworth, 10.30am, Little Budworth Common Country Park, car park off A49, 6 or 8 mls, D. 01252 72385.

CORNWALL
27 Dec: CRANTOCK (NEWQUAY), 1.30pm, West Penrice Village car park, 4½ mls, D. 01326 340728.

POLZEATH, 10am, New Polzeath car park, 3 mls, 01208 73489.

CUMBRIA
26 Dec: COCKERMOUTH, 11am, 10 mls, 01228 74746; 29 Dec: CARLISLE, 10am, The Sands car park, near Turf Inn, 5 mls, D. 01228 74746. 1 Jan: BRAMPTON, 9.45am, Tolkyn' Tarn car park, 7 mls, 01228 23656.

DERBYSHIRE
27 Dec: TICKNALL, 10am, Village Hall car park, 8 mls, 01332 516264.

ESSEX
26 Dec: EASTWOOD, 10am, Edwards Hall Park car park, 5 mls, D. 01702 529884.

EPPING, 10.30am, Tube station, 6 mls, 0181 590 6444(e); KELVEDON,

10.30am, playing field car park, 3-4 mls, D. 01708 509935.

LOUGHTON, 10.30am, Tube station, 8-9 mls, 0181-502 2390.

PARBOLD, 10.30am, railway station, 5 mls, D. 01772 26203.

82392, 27 Dec: BISHOPS CLEEVE, 10am, Post Office, 5½ mls, D. 01242 674470.

HAMPSHIRE
27 Dec: ASHURST, 10.30am, station car park, by New Forest Hotel, 6 mls, D. 01703 79640.

LEICESTERSHIRE

SOUTHWICK, 10am, public car park, Golden Lion, 5 or 10 mls, D. 01329 284556.

SOUTHWICH EAVES, 1.30pm, public car park, Golden Lion, 5 mls, 01329 284556.

HEREFORD & WORCESTER
26 Dec: HALLESOWEN, 10am, Nimmings car park, Cleint Hills, 6 mls, 0184 395692(e).

27 Dec: BROMSGROVE,

10am, old A38 (Birmingham) road, Lydiate Ash, 4 and 8 mls, D. 01527 877122.

HERTFORDSHIRE
26 Dec: BAYFORD, 10.30am, station car park, 8 mls, D. 0181 360 268. LILLEY, 10am, off Links Way, 5 mls.

KENT
26 Dec: COBHAM, 10am, public car park, 5 mls, 01322 554259.

KESTON (BROMLEY), 10am, Commonside car park, 4-5 mls, D.

27 Dec: OTFORD, 10.30am, village car park (call contact if you want pub lunch), 7 mls, D. 0181 468 7867.

SHIPBORNE, 11.30am, church, 4½ mls, D. 01732 851310.

LANCASHIRE
26 Dec: HOUGHTON, 1pm, Station Rd, by level crossing, 6 mls, D. 01772 312027.

26 Dec: PARBOLD, 1.30pm, railway station, 5 mls, D. 01772 26203.

812034(e); TOTSIDDE, 10am, call for meeting place, 5-6 mls, D. 01200 423881 (e), 27 Dec:

OARWEIN, 9.30am, Entwistle reservoir car park, Green Arms Rd, 10 mls, D. 01772 431053 or 01257 263841(e); GARSTANG, 10am, Community Centre car park, 7 mls, 01995 604716.

NORTHUMBERLAND
27 Dec: MORPETH, 10am, coach stop (pre-paid booking fee for bus journey to Morpeth), Prudhoe Place, Newcastle, various lengths, 7 to 14 mls, 22 0191 285 3050.

29 Dec: ALWINTON, 9.30am,

26 Dec: LUTTERWORTH, 10.30am, Town Hall car park, 4 mls, 0145 552265.

WOODHOUSE EAVES, 10.30am, Main Street car park, 6½ mls, D. 01509 413801(e).

LINCOLNSHIRE
26 Dec: HORNCastle, 10am, Market Place, 4½ mls, O. 01507 523013.

STAMFORD, 10am, Pickworth Church, 9-10 mls, O. 01778 426417(e); WELBOURN, 10.30am, View Point, Potsgrove Rd, 1½ miles SW of Wellington picnic site, 4-5 mls, D. 01522 522934(e).

LONDON
26 Dec: TOTTERIDGE, 1.30pm, Totteridge & Whetstone tube station, 6 mls, D. 01372 421384.

27 Dec: STANMORE, 11.15am, Tube station, 6½ mls, D. 0171 722 5059.

OXFORDSHIRE
26 Dec: CROCKER END, 10am, Crocker End Green, Nettlebed, near Henley, 9 mls, D. 0191 574065. 27 Dec: BUSCOT, 10am, National Trust car park, 5 or 6½ mls, D. 01367 241384.

SHROPSHIRE
27 Dec: CHURCH STRETTON, 10.30am, car park, Easthope Rd, 8 mls, D. 01743 244922.

SOMERSET (inc Bath)
26 Dec: POKTISHEAD, 10am, Esplanade (south end), 5 mls, D. 0117 9324791.

27 Dec: HESWALL, 10.30am, Banks Rd car park, Lower Heswall, 6 mls.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
22 Dec: SLIPTON, 10.30am, Samuel Pepys pub, 4½ mls, D. 01536 723394, 26 Dec:

CHIPPING WARDEN, 10am, church, 5-6 mls, D. 01604 492265(e).

27 Dec: HESWALL, 10.30am, church, 6½ mls, D. 01295 266979.

15.15am, The Lilacs pub, 5 mls, D. 01536 511162(e).

STAFFORDSHIRE
22 Dec: TAMWORTH, 10.30am, Spinning School Lane car park, 6 mls, D. 01827 899355.

26 Dec: BIDDULPH, 6-8 mls, D. 01821 512545.

26 Dec: EDMUNDSTON, 10.30am,

Christchurch Moreton Hall Estate, 5 mls. Dogs allowed at rear, 01284 768729.

IPSWICH, 10.30am, rear, 01284 768729.

29 Dec: ALWINTON, 9.30am,

coach stop (pre-paid booking fee for bus journey to Alwinton, £4), Prudhoe Place, Newcastle, various lengths, 7 to 14 mls, 22 0191 487 1541.

CRASTER, 10.30am, Quarry car park, 7 mls, D. 01665 605212.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
26 Dec: NOTTINGHAM, 11am, Clumber Park cricket ground, 4-5 mls, O. 01302 743789.

YORKSHIRE (EAST RIDING, KINGSTON UPON HULL & YORK)
26 Dec: HULL, 10.30am, Welton Pond, 8 mls, D. 01904 708479.

27 Dec: BEVERLEY, 10.30am, Morrisons supermarket car park, 5 mls, D. 0181 660 5733.

ENGLEFIELD GREEN, 10am, Fox & Hounds pub, 6 mls, D. 01276 26921. EPSOM, 10am, Headley Heath main car park, 5 mls, D. 0181 3372485.

REIGATE, 10.30am, Reigate Heath car park, Flanchord Rd, 5 mls, D. 01737 83155, 27 Dec:

BUSCOT, 10am, National Trust car park, 5 or 6½ mls, D. 01482 861988.

YORKSHIRE (NORTH)
26 Dec: MALTON, 10am, Barton Hill, 10 mls, D. 01904 708479.

27 Dec: REIGNARTON, 10am, Summers Rd, 9 mls, D. 01428 662842.

OXSHOTT, 10am, car park on north side of station, 5 mls, D. 01372 720816.

SUSSEX (EAST)
26 Dec: WINCHELSEA, 10am, Lay-by next to Monks Walk, 6 mls, D. 01424 213666 (e).

SUSSEX (WEST)
26 Dec: WASHINGTON, 10.30am, Frankland Arms area, 4-5 mls, D. 01273 452360.

TYNE & WEAR (inc Gateshead and Sunderland)
26 Dec: WHITBIK, 11am, Lizard Point car park, near Souter Lighthouse, 6 mls, D. 0191 5841736, 1 Jan:

WHICKHAM, 1pm, Woodhouse Arms, Fellside Rd, 4-5 mls, D. 0191 4887693.

WILTSHIRE
27 Dec: KENILWORTH, 10.30am, Kenilworth Castle car park, 6 mls, D. 01203 403737.

WILTSHIRE
26 Dec: SWINDON, 10.15am,

Shotley Rd, 5 mls, D. 01473 623431.



CATHERINE DONALDSON

The fruit of Christmas

In the depths of winter, oranges glow like small suns. By Anna Pavord

Oranges were what made Christmas special for my mother, who was brought up, one of a dozen children, on her family's farm in Wales. I never knew her father, who died before I was born, but he lived vividly through her stories. As a young man, he set sail for the States with four pedigree Hereford bulls as his fortune. He returned with a 10-gallon hat and a pair of Colt pistols to sweep my rather refined Herefordshire grandmother off her feet and into the wilds of the Welsh border country.

His hat hung in our cloakroom all through my childhood, stiff as chipboard, worn completely through in one crease of the crown. Once, I came across my brother standing in front of the hall mirror with the hat on his head, but I could tell from the look on his face that he knew it was, in every respect, too big for him.

By the time the vast family was marshalled in 1918 in front of a photographer's studio backdrop (improbably painted with a scene from classical Italy), my grandfather had mellowed into an Edwardian paterfamilias broad-shouldered, bearded, the spitting image of the Prince of Wales. But even at this benevolent stage, my mother remembered him each Christmas Eve, driving the gig at a brilliantly reckless pace back from the local market town, with presents for all hidden under a rug. And crates of oranges, which never appeared at any other time in their lives.

They can scarcely be called treats now, but I still think of oranges as particularly Christmassy fruit. They taste better during this season than at any other time of the year. The colour is right, too. Oranges glow like small suns in the depths of the winter solstice.

Unlike the sort of fruit that we are more used to growing – conveyor-belt stuff which blossoms at one end of the growing season and fruits at the other – oranges peak in one outrageous burst: scented blossom and ripe fruit all at the same time. And all at the lowest ebb of the year, when we are most in need of a treat.

I haven't got the right kind of place to overwinter citrus trees (they hate frost), or else I'd have bought some long ago. I can't think of anything I'd like better in the dining room at Christmas than orange trees, soberly trained, the glossy fruit hanging like baubles from the branches. And imagine the swoony smell.

Imagine it all I can do for the moment. But when I get those trees, they will be planted in big clay pots and set inside the square wooden boxes called Versailles tubs. The most practical kind have one side that lets down, so you can get the pots in and out easily. Mine will have wheels, too, to ease the annual pilgrimage from winter glass to summer sunshine. Citrus trees don't like being under cover the whole time, as early growers soon discovered. But though we haven't got the trees,

I buy the fruit, like my grandfather, by the crate. Christmas oranges are piled up in a pyramid on the window ledge by the back door. They are set in rows along the mantelpieces among mounds of silvered ivy acting as holders for small red candles, set in a ring round the table centrepiece. They are wired on to the swags of greenery that hang down the side of the windows in the kitchen and the dining room.

The house fills, not with the scent of the flowers but with the more complex smell of the faintly oily peel. And then, as New Year comes, this changes to a whiff of mould, as the oranges being used as candle holders start quietly to rot. "Symbolic," said a friend at a New Year's lunch, as she gazed transfixed at one of these moulder fruit, sagging under the weight of its candle.

Nobody has done so spectacularly well out of oranges as Neil Gwyn. She probably sold fruit shipped in from Portugal, where it had been introduced earlier from Ceylon. Of course, it was a seasonal fruit then, appearing from the end of November onwards, when vast quantities of Portuguese oranges were brought into the London docks. But English gardeners had been trying to grow them for almost a hundred years before Gwyn stole the Drury Lane scene. The first one who succeeded was Francis Carew, who had them on his estate at Beddington, near Croydon, in about 1562.

Opinions differ about the right sort of compost to grow potted citrus trees in. Chris Dennis, who, with his wife Amanda, set up the Citrus Centre near Pulborough, West Sussex, two years ago, favours a light, soilless compost; he finds that the soil-based John Innes types dry out too slowly between waterings. But if you use a soilless compost you need to plant in hot pots, not less than 2ft across.

"Watering is the key," he says. "You must let the plants dry out between each drink. Most of the citrus trees that die in this country die from drowning." The Dennis mix coarse bark with the compost to improve drainage round the roots in winter. In winter, orange trees should be kept cool and on the dryish side. In summer, the leaves can be sprayed over with a hosepipe at regular intervals.

Pests are most likely to attack while the trees are under cover. Red spider mites, whiteflies, mealybugs and scale insects all love them. If trees get infested, sooty mould soon follows on. The most troublesome time is early spring, when it is still too chilly for the trees to go outside, but their new growth is at its most juicy and attractive to pests. Out of doors, citrus trees are much less trouble, so keep them there as long as you dare.

The old-fashioned way of controlling pests on orange trees combined vigilance with soap. Head gardeners patrolled trees under cover every week.

Any that showed signs of infestation were thoroughly drenched with a solution of suds. This is the best way to clean off sooty mould, too. Rub the leaves with your thumbs, gently massaging the mould away.

The modern way is to use biological controls, setting phytoseiulus against red spider, encarsia against whitefly. There are problems though. The citrus overwinter most comfortably at cool, though frost-free temperatures. The predators, particularly the Australian cryptolaemus, work and reproduce best in heat – up to 70F. And you have to let the pests build up before you introduce the predators.

Lemons, types of *Citrus limon*, are more easily grown than oranges in this country. But there are 25 different kinds of orange available from specialist nurseries, such as the Citrus Centre and Rends. For flavour, the best is undoubtedly the 'Washington Navel', introduced into the US from Brazil in 1870. Unfortunately it has a kamikaze tendency to drop all its fruit as soon as they set. For a better chance of oranges for Christmas to come, try 'Salustiana' or 'Valencia'.

The Citrus Centre is at West Mare Lane, Marehill, Pulborough, West Sussex RH20 2EA (01798 877886). Open Wed-Sun (9.30am-5.30pm). Send a SAE for a catalogue. Plans can be sent by mail order or bought at the Centre.

Duff Hart-Davis The beast will progress in a cacophony of drums, shakers and tin whistles

This evening, at the winter solstice, the turning of the year, mummers in villages all over England will raise echoes from deep in our past with their raucous, ritual plays. In a hundred pubs and squares the Turkish Knight (villain) will meet St George or King George (hero); after a few bragging exchanges the hero will be killed, and then revived by the Quack Doctor. Finally a hideously masked figure will announce himself:

"In comes I
Beelzebub,
Over my shoulder I
carries a club,
In my hand a
dripping pan:
Don't you think I'm a
jolly old man?"

In 10 or 12 minutes the little dramas will be over, and the players will shamelessly dupe spectators for money.

Then they will sing a wassail song, invoking good health, and get down to some serious imbibing.

The mummers' plays are so ancient that nobody is certain of their origins. Some people believe they date only from the 18th century, others that they derive from the 11th-century Crusades, and others still that they hark right back to Aristophanes in the fifth century BC.

Unlike Morris dancing, which died out in Victorian times and was revived in the Twenties, the plays seem to have been performed without a break. Certainly, 100 years ago they were used by poor country lads as an excuse for knocking on rich men's doors and earning a little Christmas money.

Their symbolism is equally obscure. Their main point is to celebrate the death of the old year and the birth of the new – but the function of Beelzebub is now lost, as is that of other minor characters such as Bolt Stasher, a gallant soldier, and Old Speckleback, "the biggest man in North Humberside".

Many of the plays open with a brief address by Father Christmas:

"In comes I, old Father Christmas;
Christmas or not, I hope

old Father Christmas will never be forgot."

For audiences familiar with the text, half the fun lies in roaring out the best-known gags in concert with the actor. Thus when Father Christmas asks the Quack Doctor what he can cure, the answer is:

"The hitch, the stitch,
the palsy and the gout,
Pains within and pains without."

It is a thousand pities that the Oxford don R.J.E. Tiddy did not live to complete his study of the plays. He collected many of the texts during the early years of this century, but was called up into the army and killed in the trenches in August 1916. The notes he left, plus the texts, were published in 1923, but, had he lived, he would undoubtedly have done more work.

That the mummers' tradition is alive and well in Gloucestershire is mainly due to the enthusiasm of Donald Workman, a forester by profession, and a man of wide-ranging imagination. His main aim now is "to make people feel they belong to the landscape". To this end he has boldly adapted this year's play in order to put fire into a huge, soulless estate of 4,000 new houses which sprawls across the hills at Eastcombe, near Stroud.

Together with a friend, Steve Rowley (a keen Morris dancer), he has "taken on the challenge of waking these people up" and, with the help of 20 pupils at Thomas Kehle School, has built a 30ft dragon of bent hazel rods and canvas. At six this evening, with him carrying the head, one helper to work the jaws, and seven more supporting segments, the beast will progress in a cacophony of drums, shakers and tin whistles across the estate to the green, where the Bold Slasher and St George will have been fighting.

The object, says Mr Workman, is for the dragon to symbolise all the latent energy in local young people. The message to the old fogeys – on this, St Thomas's day, the shortest of the year – is "You may put us down. But we'll come back and back".

Rosemary, the red-nosed reindeer?

Malcolm Smith explodes some seasonal myths

Christmas may be commercialised, but it is surprising how some of its age-old associates remain as commonplace, and as fresh, as they ever have been. Yet, in reality, what a bunch of Christmas interlopers they are. Mistletoe, a hangover from pagan rituals, is in decline in the wild. Rudolph the reindeer is not Rudolph at all, but Rosemary (and she doesn't have a red nose). Robins are so aggressive they hardly deserve any place in a Christian festival. And the Norway spruce, that most popular of Christmas trees, is a virtual newcomer.

Relindeer: In 1823, when Professor Clement Clarke Moore of New York State published his poem, "The Night Before Christmas" in *The Troy Sentinel*, he couldn't have chosen a more inappropriate animal to pull Santa's voluminous sleigh. The legend of Rudolph was born. Red-nosed from the cold air, he and his companions had to fly to keep their parcel deliveries on time.

But, as any Lapp worth his seal meat knows, reindeer

can't be hurried. Adapted to a cold life, they overheat all too easily, panting and salivating after less than a kilometre at full gallop. In the mild British Christmas climate, a few streets at a fast trot would do them in.

Reindeer have special noses. Covered in hair, they stay warm and dry because their design ensures that the air they breathe is heated up, and the exhaled air cooled, conserving body heat and water vapour. However cold it becomes, they don't become even the slightest bit pink. Red, never.

If antlers are vital when the sleigh crosses that winter's sky, Rudolph is out of a job. After the autumn mating season, male reindeer shed their antlers. But the females retain theirs. So, come Christmas Eve, your children's presents may be hauled by Ruth, Rosemary or Rachel – but not by Rudolph.

Mistletoe: Worshipped by the Druids, mistletoe has long been a part of the Christmas festivities. But for how much longer? It is a parasite with no



roots of its own, and its fate now hangs on the future of old orchard apple trees.

In 1957, England had 26,000 hectares of dessert apple orchards. Now, barely 10,000 hectares remain. Not so in France. The French have retained many of their old orchards and their mistletoe flourishes. Napoleon gave it a helping hand by planting poplars along French roadsides, essentially to shade his soldiers from the midday sun. Perhaps it was also to supply the infantry with sprigs of mistletoe to give to their sweethearts at Christmas.

Robins: There are more than four million pairs of robins in this country, and the bird was ranked sixth in the British Trust for Ornithology's Garden Birdwatch survey this year. Although they look chirpy on our Christmas cards, ironically robins are less likely to survive cold winters than many other birds because they depend so much on ground-living prey. But, because a pair frequently rears two or three broods each summer, numbers recover quickly. And robins are fiercely territorial, which does allow them to live at high densities, particularly in woods, where up to 66 pairs have been recorded in a square kilometre.

The much loved robin has been little molested over the centuries, with a couple of exceptions. In the mid-1800s they became an epicurean treat, and, in the 1890s, a millinery adornment: the

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Present and correct

Louise Levene goes panic buying

It is Christmas Morning. You are on a remote stretch of road somewhere between Bodmin Moor and the Atlantic Ocean. The mobile phone rings. It is your mother. "You haven't forgotten that Tilly and the twins are still here have you? Do hurry. I've put the sprouts on." The ultimate Christmas nightmare begins: you have precisely 45 minutes to find three presents and all you have on you in the way of gifts are the his-and-hers prescription Rav-Bans you got for your parents; a set of monogrammed golf-club cosies and a large box of diabetic chocolates.

What the hell do you do? First, find a petrol station that's open. Deep breaths. Remind yourself that just because a present is practical and widely available doesn't mean that people won't be grateful for it. Even the grottiest petrol station should furnish some of the following:

Magazines: Buy one. Roll it up. Slap some tinsel round it (hegged from garage owner's festive hangings if necessary). Hand this unpromising looking gift to bemused cousin as you explain that this is merely the first installment of their gift subscription. Mental note to self to arrange gift subscription as soon as you get home. Ideally it should be something they like (*Private Eye*, £17; *Forbes Times*, £30; *77*, £9) but mainstream is good too

(*Hello*, £92; *Radio Times*, £52; *BBC Good Food*, £18.60). These should all be quite widely available but knowing your luck you could end up with *Caravan Life* (£27) or *Punch* (a staggering £76.50).

Entire cartons of sweets: Bully the attendant into having a shufti in the stockroom and dig out 40 tubes of Polo Mints (£9.12) or 36 packs of Tunes (£4.04). Good present for greedy small children with good brushing habits or for the sort of people who can't drive to the end of the road without sticking something in their mouths.

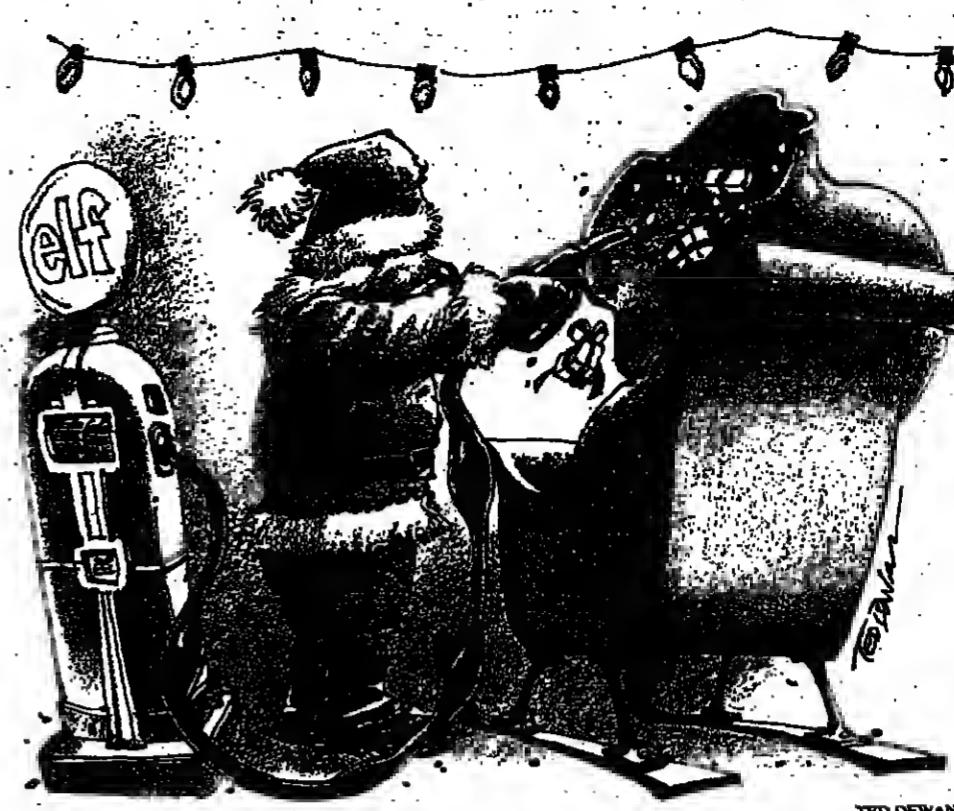
Fags: Be realistic. Your not buying cigarettes for a smoker doesn't mean they will smoke any less of the things. Make someone really happy with 200 Silk Cut (£31). Reformers among you might consider buying a milder variety than the recipient actually likes. Large cartons of Swan Vesters (£4.75) also please — young men usually rather enjoy the fact that they can strike a match on the ase of their jeans.

Get the man in the shop to either sell you a Christmas card or beg him to give you an envelope. Put a few quid in it. Seal envelope. Small children adore having money to spend and they always prefer hard cash to novelty mittens.

Stop at the nearest pub. Try to look unconcerned as festive rural conversation stops and dogs begin

to howl. Approach the bar with confidence and attempt to sweet talk the totally strange landlord into selling you a nice big bottle of Bells with the label on upside down. An understanding chap at the Licensed Victuallers Association suggests that one should expect to add at least fifty per cent to the supermarket price. More persuasive types might get them to part with an ice bucket for around £10 or a card of peanut packets with a half-naked woman underneath (£8.64). A box of beers — 50p if you're lucky. Landlords approached during extensive research for this article were very unforthcoming, one uncharitable soul actually demanding that a bottle of Bells should be sold by the gill, i.e. for £70. If you succeed in this Herculean mission you should consider a career as a time share salesman.

OK. That was nice. It may have been limited but it was at least shopping of a sort. Suppose it gets worse than that. Suppose civilisation has been left so far behind you cannot find a pub or a petrol station. Time to turn your gaze upon the interior of the car. Ask yourself: have I ever used the First Aid kit? If not, it might make a suitable gift for a young accident-prone cousin whose 2CV doesn't run to such luxuries. All right. Let's get serious. Has your aunt ever seen those earrings?



TED DEWAN

You might be able to slip them inside a Christmassy United mascot? Nodding dog? You leave the car. Is there a bolly bush in their garden? Potted bay trees on the path? Gnomes? Ding dong. If the worst comes to the worst you could always settle for the doormat.

Property: the most exciting houses sold in 1996....19
Money: do you get good value for your pension?...21

Six of the best Christmas crackers

Christmas dinner wouldn't be the same without a good cracker to pull. Traditionally, Christmas crackers have been about a big bang, a dodgy joke and an impossible puzzle or game. Unfortunately, not much has changed: the jokes are still dodgy and the only alternative seems to be straight facts — do we really want to know about the speed of the universe? The

hats haven't changed much either. The only difference lies in the gifts. Still, don't expect too much — you have to pay considerably more for the truly special ones — Liberty do crackers with small silver gifts at £69.95 for six. If you buy any small gift at Tiffany & Co they will wrap it in a cracker for free. Better still, stick to our cheap and chic selection for a cracking good Christmas.



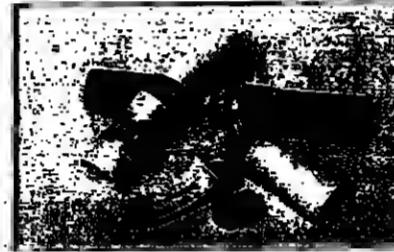
1 Six black crackers with gold painted hearts and red raffia bows, £29.95, from Liberty, 214-220 Regent Street, London, W1 (0171-734 1234). The tested cracker contained a miniature bottle of prune cognac, a paper party hat and a joke: What is the strongest bird in the world? A crane! Cracker rating 5/6.



2 Six green and red luxury crackers with festive gold writing, £20, from W.H. Smiths, branches nationwide (0171-616161). The tested cracker contained a mini padlock, a paper hat, and a little fact: Who was the designer of the original Morris Minor? Alex Issigonis. Cracker rating 4/6.



3 Six silver holographic crackers, £14.50, from Paperchase, 213 Tottenham Court Road, London, W1 (0171-580 8496) and branches nationwide. The tested cracker contained two pencils, a paper hat, and a joke: Why did the garden fence? Because it saw the window box! Cracker rating 4/6



4 Six black and white "minimalist" style crackers, £19.95, from The Conran Shop, Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road, London, SW3 (0171-539 7401). The tested cracker contained a gold pill box, a paper hat and a joke: What is the best diet for athletes? Runner beans and mussels! Cracker rating 6/6.



5 Six multi-coloured crackers with a gold centre band, £15.95, from Heals, 196 Tottenham Court Road, W1P 9LD (0171-631 1666). The tested cracker contained a dice game, a paper hat and a joke: What do they sing at a snowman's birthday party? "Freezily Good Fellow"! Cracker rating 5/6.



6 Twelve traditional crackers with floral design, £10, from Boots, 17A Kensington High Street, W8 SSF, and branches nationwide (0159 950611). The tested cracker contained a novelty gift, a paper hat, and a joke: Where do baby apes sleep? In apricots! Cracker rating 4/6.

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Help is at hand at the end of the line

Spendthrift on the sofa. By Charlotte Packer

Last minute shopping doesn't have to be the manic and depressing experience most would have you believe. Although many mail order companies listed last Thursday as their final order date for Christmas deliveries, we have tracked down a few who are willing to take orders today, tomorrow and Monday, and will make sure the goods arrive in time for Christmas. With our guide all you need to do is make a pot of coffee (or better still crack open a bottle or wine), settle yourself by the telephone and have your credit card to hand. One word of warning: placing orders so close to Christmas means that postal delivery will be impossible so you will be paying for express or courier services; these charges will vary from company to company and depend on the distances involved.

Boden Catalogue and Mini Boden, 0181-453 1535 or fax 0181-453 1536. Last orders 3pm today. Clothes always make good presents and Boden are offering up to 25 per cent off on selected items: beautiful French Collar wool cardigans in time green, hot orange or charcoal are now £58 (down from £68), and luxurious heavy silk shirts (five different colours) which were £72, are now only £58. For men there are bright woven silk ties at £29 (down from £36), or cotton car coats with fleecy linings for £35.

The Mini Boden (from 0-12 years) catalogue contains plenty of items which would make great kids presents. Knotted stripy pull-on hats are particularly nice and great value at £6. If you want something more substantial try the corduroy jackets with padded tartan linings, £30-34. In the main the clothes are comfy and functional and most are machine washable. As with the adult range all occasions are catered for: party clothes through to cosy nighties and pyjamas.

If you are not sure about what to get the sales team will be able to advise you. And if you get it wrong, Boden are happy to arrange refunds.

Johnny Loves Rosie, 0171-435 0089; fax 0171-794 0534. Last orders by 5pm today. If you are looking for a teenager's stocking fillers theo Johnny Loves Rosie, a company that specialises in accessories, is the place to start. The stock is mostly imported from America and is very strong on hair accessories. Wooden hair slides encrusted with varnished Liquorice Allsorts (£10.95) are typical of the look they promote. The company is also big on fake flowers, offering huge roses in improbable colours attached to hair slides (£7.50-£16.95). Glitter also features heavily - sparkly Alice hands from £10-24. Their new catalogue includes nail-files printed with tropical fruit, lips, roses, chili pep-

pers and sunflowers (£2.50) and last year they launched red and black patent leather shoulder bags for carrying bottled water (£12.95).

The General Trading Company, 0171-730 7220; fax 0171-823 4526

You could buy presents for the whole family here. Stock ranges from the trinket/gift end of the market (ceramic pumpkin trinket pot, £6.95; silver plated hedgehog candle holder, £9.95; spice scented mug mats, £11.95 for four) through to jolly things for children (watch with Moopy strap, £14; Emma Bridgewater initial mugs, £9.75; giraffe height chart, £28). Kitchen gadgets include useful things like saucepans or corkscrews as well as fun items like heavy-duty rubber gloves with gingham cuffs and decorated plastic strawberries.

Scent Direct, 01428 654575. Last orders 23 December.

Perfume costs about the same as a bunch of flowers, smells as good and lasts much longer. The company has access to over 700 different perfumes and all arrive beautifully giftwrapped with a handwritten message. Scent Direct also operates a search service which is particularly useful should you want to buy someone a new perfume. Simply let the sales team know what your friend usually wears, and they will identify perfumes with the same top, middle and base notes.

Red Letter Days, 0181-343 8822.

Last orders 12 noon, Tuesday 24th. Red Letter Days is a company that boasts over 200 alternative gift "experiences" few of which are for the faint hearted. All the obvious things are here: a day's ballooning, from £45-£225; parascending, £25 for a ride; £75 for a half-day course; and of course Bungee jumping, £59. But there are lots of other really unusual and fun options too. What about buying your granny a Llama trek in west Sussex (£59) or your brother an hour-long Microlight flight (£99)? If you can't make up your mind you can always buy a voucher, from £39 to £1,250 which will allow the receiver to choose what they want to put themselves through.

Ocean catalogue, 0800-132985; fax 0171-498 8898. Last orders 12.30pm, 23rd December.

Ocean is a stylish home accessories catalogue and although it is targeted at adults, there are one or two items which would suit teenagers and children: brightly coloured or animal print storage boxes, £6.95-£10.95; kids pyjamas (from £17.95). For older friends and family the choice is much wider. At the top end of the scale there are plenty of things for people with extravagant tastes - Alessi kettle (£69.95), Acca Kappa Travel Kit (£69). At the other

extreme there are lots of well-priced items, many of which look rather more expensive than they are, for those less demanding souls - set of six shot glasses (£13.95); Silver plated memo pad (£9.95); silver-plated wine stoppers (£9.95).

Bates Gentlemen's Hatters, 0171-734 2722. Last orders Monday 23rd.

If you're having problems finding a present for a troublesome older male, a hat or cap of some description may well be the answer. Although Bates is one of the few places where you could buy a curly brim bowler or a top hat, their best sellers are flat caps and baker's boy caps. The assistants will be able to talk you through the different styles: deerstalker, Fedoras, Bowlers, toppers, bowlers, boaters, and many more. Prices from around £30 to £120.

Panzers, 0171-722 1496/8152 or 0171-435 0165; fax 0171-586 0209. Last orders: 1pm 23rd December for nationwide delivery; 7pm 23rd for London.

Hampers are always well received, and the ones from Panzers are particularly imaginative. The Italian hamper (£100) is a glossy green hat box filled with Italian goodies including white truffle oil, figs in chocolate, panforte, palmier ham. The London hamper (£60) includes smoked salmon, stilton, Merlot 1995, shortbread and other delicious things all squeezed into a traditional wicker basket. Although only £45, the Boxing Day hamper conforms best to my idea of what a hamper should be: a labour saving though indulgent meal. It comes in a wicker basket and includes a bottle of sauvignon, smoked salmon, cocktail blinis, stilton and Ackermann's chocolate truffles.

The Food Ferry, 0171-498 0827; fax 0171-498 8009. Last orders 10.30am, 23rd

This is London's mail order supermarket and the company rapidly comes into its own around this time of year. Imagine: you are holed up with the relatives, and more have been spotted on the horizon and you realise that you forgot to buy Brussels sprouts/cranberry sauce/Bath Olivers/Ionic water. They won't get you out of a turkey crisis but if you find yourself playing unexpected host this Christmas, give them a call and they should be able to ease you out of a tight spot.

The following delivery companies will all be operating as normal on Monday and Tuesday, but call to check cut-off times for booking couriers. They all warn that Monday will be a very busy day.

Red Star: 0345 000000
TNT: 0181-961 9393
DHL International: 0345 100300

good thing

Waterproof Mudskippers £29.99 plus postage and packing.

A Danish fishing invention provided the inspiration for this piece of children's armour - designed for kids with an appetite for mess. For extensive off-road exploration

wellies just don't let you get right up to your elbows in filth and are easily sucked in mid-wade by mud with an appetite for small feet. These brightly coloured salopettes are moulded directly onto tough rubber boots to provide full protective entertainment.

Mudskippers, The Edington Sporting Company, 8-10 White Hays North, West Wils Trading Estate, Westbury, Wilts BA13 4JT (01373 825469)

mad thing

Address book, Out of Earth, £8.90

If you know lots of liars, cheats, thieves, riff-raff or phonies this is the address book for you. Alternatively if you only keep your friends numbers in your little black book that's OK too. In fact this address book is for everyone and anyone. Buy it as a last minute Christmas present for your Aunt Hilda and kiss goodbye to those surprise Sunday visits.

Out of the Earth, 83 Church Road, Barnes, London SW13 (0181-563 9991).

sure thing

TV's Kevin Whately is the wearer of these cuff links which are part of a collection of silver giftware from Goldsmiths and Walker and Hall stores. For every purchase Goldsmiths will contribute ten per cent to The Prince's Trust.

Goldsmiths, 2 Elland Road, Bradford, Leeds LE3, ITT (0116-232 2000)

correction

In last Saturday's article on silver, comments about hallmarking by Ian Ferguson were wrongly attributed to Alistair McCallum. We apologise for the embarrassment caused.



Ten for under a tenner

The mad scramble is on for last minute presents and stocking fillers. This year the shops are awash with classy little treats for under a tenner such as gilty bottle stoppers, a Pooh bear

fun watch, lots of that nice smelly stuff to put in the bath and just for *Independent* readers the chance to buy a Penguin T-shirt - complete with appropriate book title - for a mere £9.99.



PHOTOGRAPH: NICK TAPSELL

London, SW1 (0171-730 0411).

8 Pooh Bear Watch, Timex, £9.99. Digital watches are not the best way to learn to tell the time but this makes a fun first watch. The stuffed Pooh Bear character lies across the watch face: simply lift his front paws to reveal the time. For nearest stockists 0171-630 8180.

9 Aardman Animation Clay Kit, £9.99 (+£1.50 p&p) The team that brought you Wallace and Gromit have created eight new characters for children to copy including a monkey, dolphin, tiger and Catfish. The Clay Kit includes a four colour clay bar, a step by step creature-creating card, modelling tool and spare eyes and ribs. For nearest stockists call 01225 466999.

10 Children's Gardening Kit, The Conran Shop, £8.95 Contains: wooden handled fork and trowel, three packets of seeds (pot marigold, coleus, and the mysterious "sensitive plant"), green twine, plastic ties, plant labels, a marker pen and red cotton gardening gloves. Call 0171-589 7401.



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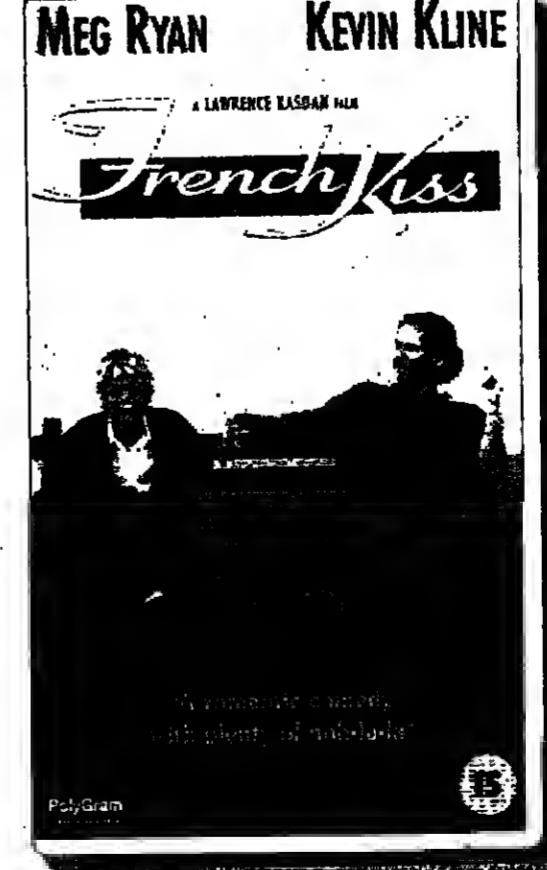
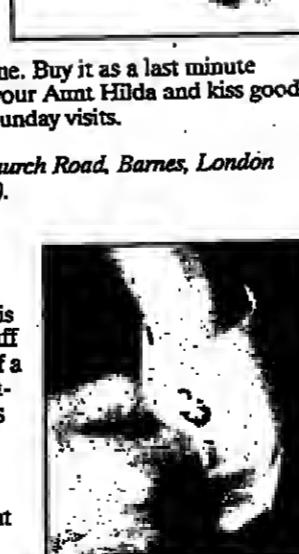
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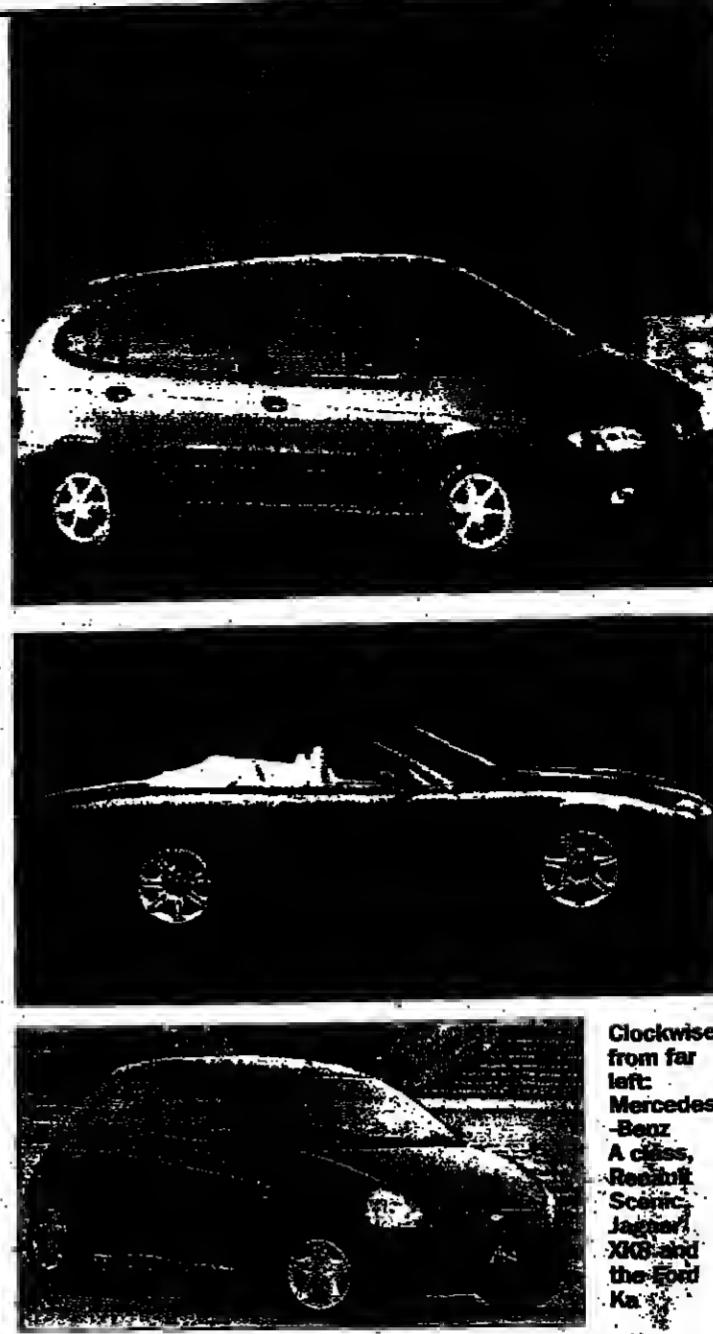
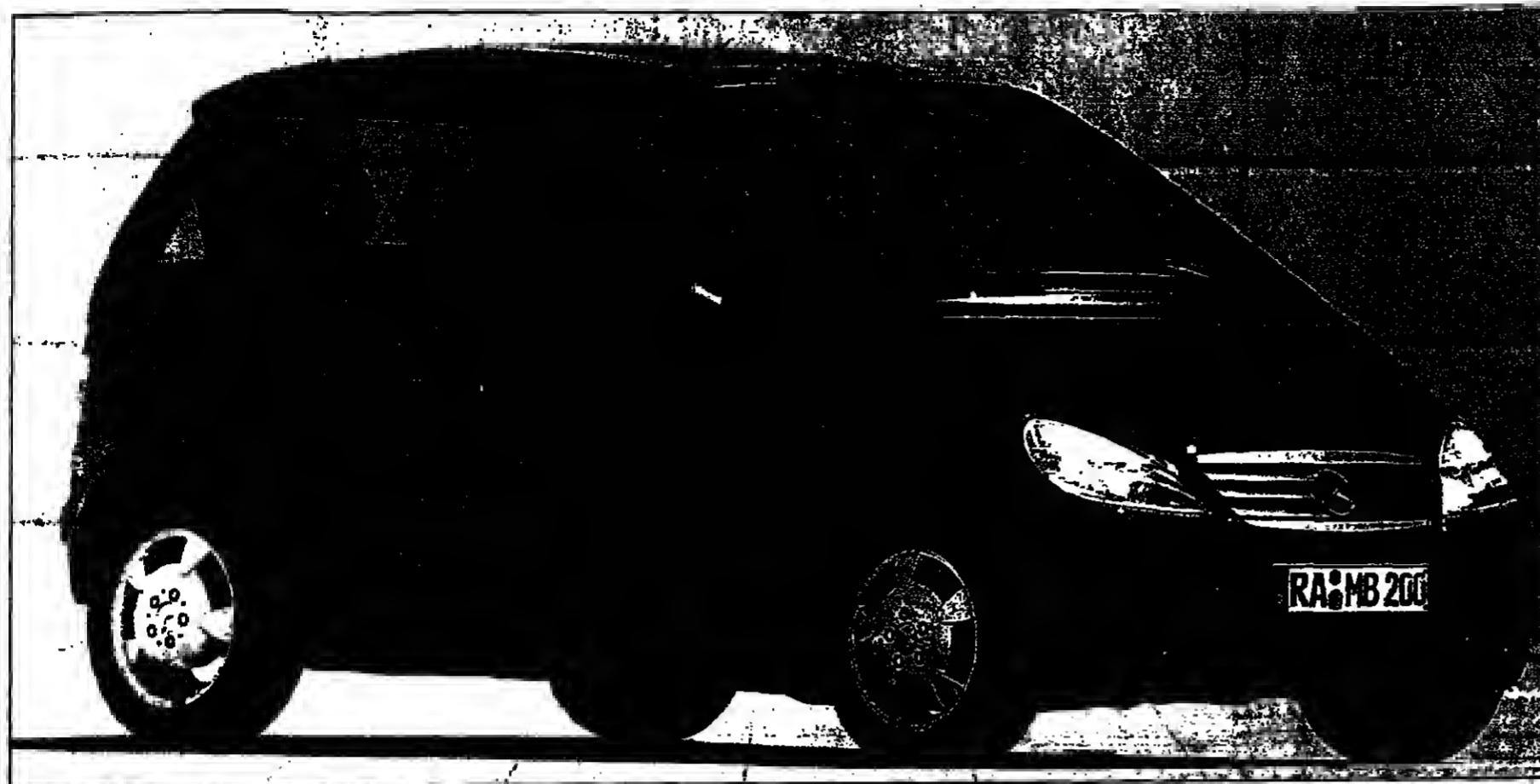
IN 783

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Smart cars, clean fuel

Gavin Green assesses the motoring year



Clockwise from far left:
Mercedes-Benz
A class,
BMW 200i,
Jaguar XKR

This year, some car makers finally proved that there is intelligence and social responsibility on the top floor and not just a manic desire to move metal and make money. Some clever solutions to long-standing problems were either previewed or put on sale. Among them was the probable answer to pollution caused by petrol or diesel vehicles.

The cleverest car to be shown in 1996 was the new Mercedes A-class. Shorter than a Fiesta but as roomy as a Mondeo, the A-class goes on sale in Europe next summer. Britain won't see it until early 1998. It's ingenious, not just because it extracts maximum cabin room from minimal exterior dimensions, but because it is also highly fuel-efficient. In diesel form, economy of over 70mpg is promised.

Also trendsetting was the Renault Scenic, now on sale in mainland Europe

and due here next summer. Little brother to the Renault Espace, the Scenic is also a motoring Tardis: an Escort-sized vehicle that holds five adults in comfort rather than like tinned fish. The key is its Espace-style one-box design, which – as with the A-class – devotes length to people rather than to a wastefully large engine or a frequently empty boot. It deservedly won the European Car of the Year award.

The past year has also seen the rebirth of the small car as an icon, 37 years after the Mini showed the way. Ford's Ka, as with the Mini, is every bit as much fun to drive as a big sports car and every bit as eye-catching. Ford was probably the most improved car maker of 1996. After years of *vouettes ordinaires*, it pumped out a great new Fiesta complete with the best little four-cylinder currently in production in Europe, a greatly improved Mondeo,

and the Ka. OK, it still has the Maverick, but nobody's perfect.

Vauxhall, whose butt has been more firmly chairbound than most makers these past few years (spending its money instead on supermodels and Ruby Wax to promote its cars) showed signs of a technical fight-back by unveiling a new twin-cam 16-valve turbo-diesel engine in the otherwise ordinary Vectra. Its secret is its marvellous economy, a real retooling step in a market still too full of slurs. It also gave the diesel a new lease of life, after various reports confirmed what many people had long thought: namely that diesel is dirty. Fortunately for the car lobby, those reports also confirmed what most of us already suspected: that the real diesel bad guys are old buses, trucks and taxis.

Rover, the nation's car maker, was shown up as a provincial, technically min-

imalist subdivision of new masters BMW in an intriguing BBC documentary (*Where Rover Met BMW*) which was as good for the BBC's and BMW's reputations as it was bad for Rover. It was left to Jaguar to prove that there is still life left in the British car industry now that the "For Sale" signs have come down (after all, there's little left to sell). Jaguar's new XKR was one of the most exceptional sports cars in a year peppered with desirable machines. In addition, there was the Mercedes SLK, which already has a worldwide waiting list of more than two years – and a new open-top Porsche, the Boxster.

Not to be outdone, Bentley, the sporting wing of Rolls-Royce, launched a new Continental T coupe. A big, bruising £220,000, 400bhp monster, with a grille as tall as a grandfather clock, the Continental T is an anachronistic leftover from the

days when most cars were gloriously over-the-top monuments to hand-craftsmanship and brute force. It is staggeringly fast and gloriously comfortable. I loved it, but it's about as significant for the future of motoring as a £5,000 Chanel evening dress is as a pointer for high street fashion.

Much more of a harbinger of what's to come is the hydrogen fuel cell, the big technical story of 1996. Both Mercedes and Toyota unveiled prototypes powered by them. Toyota's being the more advanced. The hydrogen fuel cell is, in effect, a new sort of battery that promises to solve the problems inherent with electric cars. The claim is for petrol engine-type performance and range, but no tailpipe pollution. It's about a dozen years from production but, if all goes to plan, it looks like doing to the petrol or diesel internal combustion engine

what the jet engine did to the propeller.

Not that the petrol motor is quite dead yet, for – just like Steve Redgrave at the Olympics – there seems to be life in the old dog yet. Mitsubishi recently launched a massively improved petrol engine in Japan, boasting 30 per cent better economy, yet identical performance and improved emissions. The secret is its direct injection, in which petrol is injected direct into the engine's combustion chambers, rather than into a manifold first. It mixes the fuel economy of a good diesel with the performance of a good petrol engine, and thus could well dump the diesel motor into the technical rubish bin, as well as current technology petrol engines. Toyota is about to launch an engine boasting similar technology. European and American makers are bound to follow.

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Dream properties of 1996

This has been the year of London and the Home Counties. Anyone looking for a period house in the country near London can expect a muted response from an estate agent; ask about prices, and the conversation will become animated. Some prices have increased by 10 to 15 per cent; others by as much as 20 per cent. The trouble is, there has not

been enough of what people want. Good quality and good location have always commanded a premium, but this year buyers soon realised that there would be competition for the best houses of their type.

Plenty of people have been sitting on cash, with nothing to sell. Their only course of action when finding the perfect house has been to offer as much as it is

worth to them. As one buyer told an agent: "I will buy it out of the market." Prices for these houses – a waterside cottage in Hampshire, a mansion in Surrey, a flat in Belgravia – have surpassed even the estate agents' expectations. Here are a few that the agents themselves have found memorable.

Penny Jackson



The Laverstoke Estate, Whitchurch, Hampshire (above): around £10m in two lots. A classic estate with a Palladian mansion bang in the middle of it. The property has some 3,200 acres of prime farmland, fishing rights and lots of cottages. One of the two best estates to be sold this year (Savills)



The Old Rectory, Chiddingstone, Kent (above): went for more than £850,000. Used in the film 'A Room with a View'. It has 16th-century origins and is part of the National Trust village, with its Tudor cottages and ancient church. Hamptons arranged 103 viewings



1 & 2 Grosvenor Studios, London SW1 (above): "I can't believe I paid £1m for a two-bedroom cottage," says the new owner. A farmhouse feel, within steps of Sloane Square. Savills' agents say it's one of the most charming homes they've ever seen in central London



Mole Hall, Wherwell, Hampshire (left): sold for more than £350,000. It was love at first sight for the new owners of this 15th-century cottage on the banks of the River Test. A dream cottage in a picturesque village, it went for more than the asking price (John D Wood)



The Walled Garden, Sherfield on Loddon, near Basingstoke, Hampshire (left): a unique use of a Victorian walled kitchen garden that sold for about £280,000. Vine houses, palm houses, potting sheds and a single-storey boathouse add up to a most unusual home (John D Wood)

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Caught short in old age

Falling gilts have pushed down pensions, reports Andrew Verity

The event didn't make the front pages of many newspapers, but for tens of thousands of people, the effect was shattering. They discovered the income many hoped to receive for the rest of their lives suddenly dropped in value by up to 4 per cent almost overnight.

Those hit are among the most vulnerable sections in society - working people who are about to retire. Normally, they would expect to cash in their pension fund in order to buy an annuity, an income for life. In September, a fund of £100,000 might buy an annuity paying a level life-time income of £11,382 for a man aged 65. The same fund today buys just £10,920.

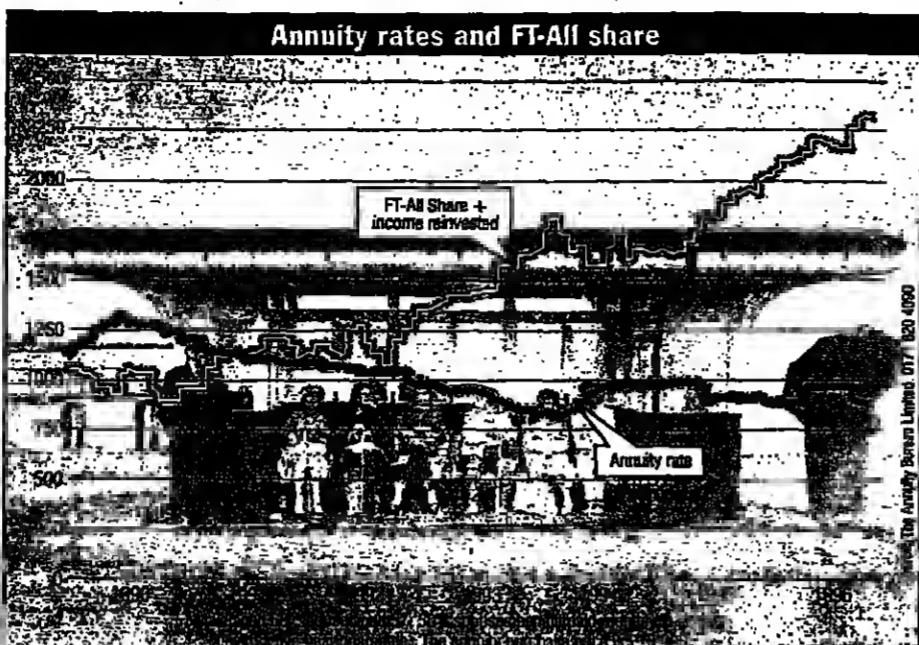
For 8 million people with a personal pension or in "money-purchase" schemes, which rely on annuities too, the income they may be locked into for the rest of their lives will vary alarmingly. More frightening is the way the value of pensions has fallen in the past five or six years.

Annuities are mainly linked to the value of long-dated gilts. Considered a safe investment, these are Government bonds issued as a means of raising money. They can rise and fall, according to whether interest rates are high or low. Low interest rates have therefore affected annuity rates.

Figures from specialist adviser Annuity Direct show that in 1990, when rates were high, a fund of £100,000 might provide an annual income of £13,785. Now, it is under £11,000. In other words, the falling gilt market has in the past six years pushed down pension incomes by more than 30 per cent.

Worse, the incomes available from annuities are likely to drop even further. Annuities also depend on mortality. The longer people live, the more it costs to provide a lifetime income.

This month, new figures are expected to show that people are now living 15 per cent longer than in the past, to the age of 82 for a



man, on average, and 86 for women. Roughly, this means you need 15 per cent more fund to get the same life-time income. To get even £10,900, a 65-year-old will need not £100,000, but closer to £115,000.

In his 1995 Finance Act, the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, tried to provide a solution, allowing people to get some income from their pension fund before they buy an annuity.

While investors waited for annuity rates to improve, they could draw an income worth anything between 35 and 100 per cent of what an annuity would give. By age 75, they would have to buy an annuity. The reform has spawned a huge £10 billion market in the new facility, known as "income drawdown". Has it worked?

Steve Bee, pensions manager at Prudential, the insurer, says: "The reform has been beneficial those who suffered most because of low annuity rates. And those who have benefited never needed it in the first place."

There are three crucial reasons. The first is charges. To pay the person who sold the income drawdown facility will cost up to 5.6 per cent of your fund, or £5,600 on a £100,000 fund. That compares to 1 per cent in commission, or £1,000, if you buy an annuity.

If the investments in your fund grow enough, they may make up for the charges. But the growth also has to cover any money you take out, otherwise you will get less in future years.

The upshot is that drawdown is only for the

relatively well-off who do not need the maximum income. Most providers insist that you have a fund of more than £100,000 unless you have income from elsewhere.

Those who need an escape from poor annuity rates can take advantage of some opportunities on offer. Most annuities are bought with pre-fixed incomes. More than 70 per cent of annuitants buy incomes fixed at a level rate. For a fund of £100,000, this might provide an annual income of £10,000.

Incomes can also escalate either by a fixed rate (3 or 5 per cent) or in line with inflation. But the price is an initial income up to 30 per cent less, or £7,000 for the same fund.

Two options offer the chance to benefit from gains in the equity market. These are with-profits annuities and unit-linked annuities.

With-profits annuities link the income you get directly to the performance of the with-profits fund. It will vary according to the bonuses announced by the fund, which in turn depend on fund performance. Therefore, a fall in the market may trigger lower incomes. While incomes from with-profits annuities will only go up if bonuses do, unit-linked annuities benefit in full from rises in the equity market. But the pay-off is that unit-linked annuities offer no protection against stock market falls.

The simplest way of boosting the income from an annuity is to shop around. The overwhelming majority of policyholders buy annuities from the company that holds their fund. If they took money elsewhere, their income could be vastly improved. Annuity Bureau figures show that, as of 4 December, a 60-year-old man with a fund of £75,000 could buy an income of £7,969 a year from Britannia Assurance. With Scottish Amicable, the annuity would be just £6,700.

Annuity Bureau's managing director, Peter Quinton, said: "People who are purchasing an annuity must shop around. Not to do so would be the same as pouring money down the drain."



Danger zone: Buying Christmas presents and taking advantage of sales is not such a cheerful experience for people who are unable to get credit. Photograph: Nick Tapsell

'Tis the season to be almost bankrupt

Neil Baker reports on ways to restore a good credit rating

Spare a thought this festive season for less fortunate people who will not be able to enjoy the traditional activities of credit-fuelled generosity, binge spending and conspicuous consumption - the people with bad credit ratings.

Doing a "proper" Christmas is now such an expensive business that for many people the most important ingredient is not goodwill, smiling children or snow - it's plastic.

A bad credit rating can be a real sicker, but the start of a new year is a good time to sort out any debts and get the slate wiped clean.

When you make any application for credit, the lender will usually do a score check. Information on the application form, such as how much

money you earn or how long you have been in your job, is used to work out how easy it will be for you to repay the money. You could pass this test with flying colours, but most lenders will also ask a credit reference agency to check your application.

Even if your financial position makes you a good credit risk, reference agencies hold information going back several years. If you have had a bad experience with credit in the past, the lender may decide not to make any credit available.

Credit reference agencies must let you see your file if you ask. Some of the information is culled from public sources. But reference agencies also hold information which many people would regard as confidential.

Whenever you take out a loan or other credit, the agreement you sign will state that the lender has the right to inform a reference agency if you default on the agreement.

Default does not just mean that you didn't pay off the money owed. One of the big two UK agencies, CCJ, can know whether you have had an unauthorised overdraft or whether any cheques or direct debits have bounced. It will know whether you have been late with any loan repayments and, if so, how late and how often.

CCJ keeps information about county court judgements (CCJs) and bankruptcy on your file for six years. Information on loans or accounts is held for six years if they

are active and three years if they are closed.

It is possible to have your slate wiped clean. "Credit repair" agencies offer to have CCJs removed from your credit file for a fee. But beware - last year the Consumer Association reported concerns that some of them acted illegally.

More than 1 million CCJs are registered each year for non-payment of debts and, according to the Consumers Association, there are three genuine reasons for having a CCJ set aside: it was registered in error, your defence, which should have been heard at the time, was not considered; or the amount was paid in full within a month. If you feel that any of those applies in your case, you

should contact the court which gave the judgement. Default notices on your credit file can be removed if you apply to the lender which put the notice there - they can tell the credit reference agency to remove the information. They might be prepared to do this if payments have been brought up to date, if you have come to an arrangement to pay, or if you are in dispute over the credit agreement.

For a copy of a "No Credit?" leaflet call the OFT on 0181-9573058. If you have problems with debts, there is an OFT leaflet called "Debt". The National Debtline phone number is 0121-359 8501 and the Consumer Counselling Service is on 0345 697301.

Money grows on Christmas trees

Tony Lyons on children's funds

Christmas is a time for giving. As well as presents, many parents, grandparents and relatives will decide to give money to a child.

Many building societies offer special children's accounts. There are, however, more exciting ways of putting money aside.

National Savings has a Children's Bonus Bond, series H, available for savings of between £25 and £1,000. It pays 6.75 per cent tax-free over the five-year term. If encashed early, interest is paid at 5 per cent a year.

For investments between £1,000 and £50,000, there is the Abbey National five-year Childre's Savings Bond, paying a guaranteed 7 per cent fixed on sums under £2,500. Early withdrawals face heavy penalties.

For something more adventurous, but without guaranteed returns, there are two equity-linked products.

Invesco, the fund manager, has the Rupert fund's children's fund. The minimum lump sum investment is £50, with regular premiums of £25 a month, its value would be £5,713 today, an annual growth rate of 12.4 per cent net after charges.

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Losses on the cards



My biggest mistake

Businessman Santa Claus

About two years ago, I'd just split up with my wife and had a cheque for about £1,500 to come, covering part of the proceeds from selling the house. On the day the cheque came, I had a poker game organised.

We were playing seven-card stud. Each player is dealt two cards face down and one face up, then there's a round of betting. Remaining cards are dealt face up. Quite often we would bet blind on the first round.

I remember I was showing a queen, and he guy opposite me a king. He bet £5 blind and raised me another £5. It all got a bit mad until we've got £50 in the pot without even looking at our cards.

Anyway, I've looked at my hidden cards and I've got two more queens. So I've got three queens straight away. He looked at his cards and then at me. Everyone else had seen sense and dropped out. The next two cards came down - two sixes for me and two nines for him. I had a full house of three queens and two sixes and there's only a couple of dozen hands in the game that can beat that. So I'm pounding in the money and he's raising me and I'm thinking: 'This is a dream, I've got him!' Eventually, I put the last of my money in and he said: 'Well?'

I'd got a full house and he did too. So I said: 'You've got

three nines, haven't you?' And he said: 'No, I've got three kings.'

After about 24 hours of poker, I sat down with shaking hands and wrote out a cheque to the guy and thought: 'Shit - what did I do that for?'

I was 23, I was earning about £15,000 and I'd never lost more than £400-£500 before.

When something like that happens, everything seems detached. You're wandering around, you can't read, you can't think, you can't eat.

The lesson it taught me was that if you're going to gamble, set aside a separate bankroll and don't use the money you need for other things.

How much I set aside to play depends on how my luck's been. I might take £300 with me and if I lose it, I lose it. On the other hand, I might not be anywhere near that amount.

I started playing poker about four years ago. I like to think my skills have improved since I lost the £1,500 but I'd far rather have lost that money than never had the experience."

Santa Claus changed his name by deed poll from Ashley Cotter Cains to promote his business providing Father Christmases for children's parties. He was talking to Paul Slade.

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THE ASSOCIATION OF INVESTMENT TRUST COMPANIES

To: Association of Investment Trust Companies, 10 Fleming Road, Newbury, Berks RG12 2DE



Please note that the above and enclosed documents are not legal or financial advice. If you require such advice, you must seek it from a qualified professional advisor.

Best borrowing rates

	Telephone	% Rate and period	Max adv %	Incentive	Redemption penalty
Food rates					
Scarborough BS	0800 590547	0.95 for 1 year	85	0.75%	—
Northern Rock	0800 591500	4.89 to 1/1/99	95	£295	—
Lambeth BS	0800 225221	7.45 to 1/1/02	70	£295	—
Variable rates					1st 5 yrs: 6.03% of sum repaid 1st 6 yrs: 5% of sum repaid 1st 5 yrs: 6 months interest
Scarborough BS	0800 590547	0.75% for 1 year	90	—	1st 5 yrs: 6.23% of sum repaid
Hinckley & Rugby	0800 774489	3.74% for 2 years	70	£250	Free valuation 1st 5 yrs: die ref'd, 6 months int.
West Bromwich BS	0121 525 7070	5.10% for 3 years	75	—	1st 6 yrs: 6% of advance
First time buyers fixed rates					
Bristol & West	0800 008088	1.95 to 1/10/97	90	275	—
Universal BS	0191 232 0973	6.45 to 1/2/00	90	£295	—
Northern Rock BS	0800 591500	7.49 to 1/1/02	95	£295	—
First time buyers variable rates					
Staffordshire BS	01902 317317	1.95 to 1/12/97	90	—	1st 5 yrs: 5% of sum repaid
Greenwich BS	0181 8588212	3.49% for 2 years	95	£250	—
Mercantile BS	0191 2959500	5.99% to 1/8/01	90	—	Refund valn fee 1st 6 yrs: discount reclaimed

Secured

	Telephone	APR %	Max LTV	Fixed monthly payments (£3,000 over 3 years)	With insurance	Without insurance
Unsecured						
Northern Rock BS	0345 421421	12.9%	—	£112.66	£102.58	—
Royal B of Scotland	0800 121125	14.0	—	£114.78	£101.45	—
Nationwide BS	via local branch	14.9	—	£113.15	£102.49	—
Secured (second charge)						
Clydesdale Bank	0800 240024	7.8	Neg	£3K - £15K	6 mths to 25 years	Term
Royal B of Scotland	0131 523 7023	9.0	70%	£2.5K-£100K	3 years to retirement	—
Midland Bank	0800 494999	9.6	90%	£5K-neg	5 years to 30 years	—

Authorised

	Telephone	Account	Authorised % pm	Unauthorised % pm	APR
Woolwich BS	0800 400900	Current	0.84	10.5	2.18
Alliance & Leicester	0500 959595	Alliance	0.76	9.5	2.20
Bank of Scotland	0800 805805	Direct Cheque	—	11.0	—

Unauthorised

	Telephone	Card Type	Min Income	Rate % pm	APR %	Annual Fee	Int. free period
Standard							
Co-operative Bank	0800 109000	Advantage Visa	—	0.54%	7.90%	nil	0 days
Capital One Bank	0800 668000	Visa	—	0.797%	9.90%	nil	54 days
Robert Fleming/S&P	0800 829242	Mastercard/Visa	—	0.9167	11.50	nil	0 days
Gold cards							
Co-operative Bank	0345 212212	Visa	£20,000	0.50	10.50	£120	46 days
RBS Advenra	0800 07770	Visa	£20,000	0.94%	11.90%	nil	56 days
Royal B of Scotland	01702 362890	Visa	£20,000	1.05%	14.50%	£35	46 days

Payment by direct debit

	Telephone	Payment by direct debit	Payment by other methods
John Lewis	via store	1.39	18.0
Marks and Spencer	01244 681681	1.87	24.8
Sears	via store	1.94	25.9

APR Annualised percentage rate. B+C Buildings and Contents insurance LTV Limit to value ASU Accident, sickness and unemployment E Available to comprehensive motor insurance policyholders aged over 22 years. H- Higher rate applies if insurance not arranged. N Introductory rate for a limited period.

All rates subject to change without notice. Source: MONEYFACTS 01632 500677 19 December 1996

Best savings rates

	Telephone number	Account	Notice or term	Deposit	Rate %	Interest interval
Portman BS	01202 292444	Instant Access	Instant	£100	4.50	Year
Co-operative Bank	0345 252000	Pathfinder	Instant	£5,000	4.75	Month
Direct Line	0181 667 1121	Instant Savings	Instant	£10,000	5.50	Year
Direct Line	0181 667 1121	Instant Savings	Instant	£50,000	5.75	Year
Teachers' BS	01202 887171	Bullion	Postal	£500	4.80	1/2 Year
Scarborough BS	0800 590578	Instant by Post	Postal	£5,000	5.70	Year
Bristol & West BS	0800 901109	Instant Access Postal	Postal	£10,000	6.00	Year
Bristol & West BS	0800 901109	Instant Access Postal	Postal	£25,000	6.05	Year
Cheltenham & Glouce	0800 717505	Direct 30	30 day P	£100	5.50	Year
First National BS	0122 314560	High Yield	30 day	£25,000	6.45	Year
Leopold Joseph & Sons	0171 288 2233	40 Day Notice	40 day	£10,000	6.22	Year
Leeds & Holbeck BS	0113 225 7777	Postal Bonus	30/4/98/P	£10,000	7	

TO FIND OUT WHAT'S ON, AND WHEN, TOMORROW READ TODAY'S EYE

Cruel Train

Zola's *La Bête Humaine* stylishly updated to the Brighton of the Blitz. All aboard with David Suchet, Saskia Reeves and Adrian Dunbar - BBC2



High Society

Who wants to be a millionaire? Bing Crosby, Grace Kelly and Frank Sinatra do. Fine vintage late Cole Porter and all that MGM gloss - BBC1



Millennium

The new one from *X-Files* creator Chris Carter - and it stars Lance Henriksen as an ex-FBI agent who has exact visions of murders. Useful - Sky 1



The EYE

Your complete Christmas guide to television and radio over the next 14 days, plus our critics choose the season's top 60 films.



Serena Mackesy
In my week

I love to watch the middle classes give standing ovations to something that, were it happening in a garage near them, they would be on to the council about

The foyer of the Bloomsbury Theatre is scattered with bodies. Slumped against walls, squatting on steps, drinking coffee, they look like the middle scene in a disaster movie: that moment when everyone starts to discuss rebuilding the city, unaware that the dam in the mountains above is about to give way. I half-expect Steve McQueen to pick his way through the crowd asking if anyone's seen his wife.

He doesn't. Instead a lady with a clipboard appears, calls "anyone else with an 11 o'clock?" and ushered another twentysomething into the auditorium. Everyone is trying to look unimpassioned, like cool people do. You've got to be pretty cool to get into Stomp.

I have a bit of time for Stomp. They're noisy and funny, and there's a wonderful elegance about constructing an entire show around banging brooms, dustbins, hammer handles, cadrums, navvies' boots and Zippo lighters. I also love to watch the middle classes give standing ovations to something that, were it happening in a garage near them, they would be on to the council about.

Stomp are touring Europe next year, and 12 of the 250-odd people who have come today will be packing their jumbos and joining them. The hopeful file onstage and form a horseshoe. In the stalls, Luke and Steve hunch in time-honoured "thank you, next" positions. Luke wears a Domine Osmond hat and chain-smokes Sile Cut, and Steve, suffering from some lurgi, is bundled up in about five coats, looking miserable. Fraser, Fiona, Theesus and Paul, old hands at this game and blessed with drummers' arms and dancers' bodies, are there to put the auditions through their paces. Fraser and Paul have fags hanging from their mouths half the time as well, with that practised carelessness of the really fit.

Luke comes forward, leans his elbows on the apron. "I'm



park. The air fills with clomping noises as people try it for themselves. Half the dancers wear that grim frown I remember from dreary winter afternoons trotting round a school hall while a woman in a bouffant wig shouted "One-two-three-one-two-three!". The others do the same, then break into cheesy grins as they get it.

Fraser, Fiona and Paul demonstrate an eight-bit routine stringing together three sets of steps and a lot of clattering with poles and hammer handles. Paul gets off-time. Luke yells: "Sack that man! You're a disgrace!" Paul boos with laughter. "Sorry, I can come back with the next group?" "No! Go away!" The three of them do it again, and this time it's faultless: the last bang of staves on boards is like a car backfiring. He got a recall.

Luke, he says, like nobody knows, and I'm one of the directors. He gives a speech: an eight-month tour, six weeks rehearsal, if you've got back or knee problems, forget it. By this time, people have stripped off their outer gear and you can tell pros from amateurs: the "real" dancers wear those tit-bugging cropped halter-neck tops people wear in *Stayin' Alive* and cast slightly contemptuous looks at those around them. Luke continues. "There's no real criteria for Stomp," he says. "So if you're a dancer or a drummer you won't necessarily fit."

Sheep and goats separate quickly. Fiona and the lads pull a series of steps at great speed, making it look like a stroll in the

Twenty-three people try it. Actually, they're not bad. I'm glad I'm in the stalls with my feet up on a seat. Steve's mobile goes off and he begins a lengthy conversation. I guess if you've been doing it long enough even the sound of hoots on wood can become background noise.

At the end, everyone has to do a solo. Ripples of horror run through the ranks. "It's just four bars," says Fraser. "Fuck it. Don't be embarrassed. Just do whatever." One woman flees the stage with her hand over her mouth. "Where was she standing?" says Luke. "Next to what's your name?" "Jordy," calls her former neighbour. "What did you say to her, Jordy?" "I told her she stink."

The rest of them, once it's too late to back out, do their danniest. Again, the people with training are easy to spot. Some try tap routines, which sound hackneyed in comparison with the crazy energy of the real Stompers; others do Young Generation-style jumps, their arms waving in faux-balletic looseness. And then there are the others: the ones who think up something funny to do, or chuck themselves into tightening breakdance. Every time someone does the splits - and one guy goes down so hard on the floor you think he'll split all the way up - Luke does a little groan of sympathy. Another does a body slam that shakes the auditorium, and the whole room whoops. As each person finishes, they run and hide behind the line, recovering from the shock of exposure.

Then it's over. One lot down, another 10 to go. Thescus, Paul, Fraser and Fiona are going to be knackered. As they wait for the next batch to file through, everyone jokes around, discusses lunch. They joke in awed tones about the body slammer. "I couldn't watch. I thought we were going to be scraping him up off the floor." He got a recall.

Two hours later, the lights are dimmed and the curtains close. The audience applauds. The curtain rises again, and the Stompers are back on stage, performing their routine again, but this time without the recalls. They're all smiling now. The audience is cheering. The curtain falls again, and the lights come up. The audience applauds again. The curtain rises again, and the Stompers are back on stage, performing their routine again, but this time without the recalls. They're all smiling now. The audience is cheering.

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The big picture

In Bed with Madonna

Sun 11.30pm BBC2

Ignoring On the Town (there are better Arthur Freed musicals on over Christmas), there's a chance to see Madonna (above) doing what she does best – and that's not singing to the masses of Buenos Aires. *In Bed...* is her film diary of the 1990 Blonde Ambition Tour. The rigorously choreographed concert routines are blinding, while the backstage stuff is by turns witty (witness her put down of Kevin Costner) and eye-boggling. Never forget, though, who's in charge here.

Television preview

Recommended viewing this weekend

by Gerard Gilbert

A head honcho at MGM in Hollywood once asked the studio's producer of musicals, Arthur Freed, whether he would audition his daughter singing at the piano. Freed agreed – and was later asked by the bigwig what he thought of the girl's singing. "Very nice," he replied, "but I hired the piano player."

The piano player turned out to be Roger Edens, and another cog in the impressive machine that Freed built up at MGM during the Forties and Fifties – a team that included Busby Berkeley, Vincente Minnelli, Stanley Donen and a repertory company led by Judy Garland, Gene Kelly and Mickey Rooney. This was the great period of American musicals (Freed produced *The Wizard of Oz*, *Meet Me in St Louis*, *Singin' in the Rain* and *An American in Paris* – all of which are showing on TV over Christmas and New Year) and *Musicals, Great Musicals* (Sat BBC2) is a handsome and definitive guide to it.

Freed imported most of his talent from Broadway, which the charming Italian-American crooner, Tony Bennett, made his home during the 1950s. *Arena: Tony*

Bennett's New York (BBC2 Sun) finds Bennett alive and well and even being adopted by the MTV generation as "The King of Cool". Actually, Bennett's intimate, microphone-hugging style is anything but "cool". It's restrained and stylised, but passionate. And the man – painting, singing and still politically engaged – is certainly not "cool" in the caricatured fashion-magazine meaning of the word.

Ian Hislop's satirical comedy, *Gobbol*, which was due to go out tonight, has become a victim of the E. coli bacteria. It was deemed an insensitive time to run a storyline about a "mad turkey disease" food scare. All is not lost on the drama front, however; we still have *Cruel Train* (Sun BBC2), Malcolm McKay's very fine adaptation of Emile Zola's *La Bête Humaine* – updating the classic thriller to the Brighton of the Blitz. It starts with a murder, as railway clerk David Suchet and his wife (Saskia Reeves) stab Reeves' rich and abusive godfather to death on the London-to-Brighton train. Things deepen and twist when Reeves starts an affair with the only witness to the deed (an engine driver played by Adrian Dunbar) and Suchet takes up gambling with the

dead man's five-pound notes. Reeves is terrific – sexy, treacherous and vulnerable, all in one roll of her richly suggestive eyes.

The two Cardiff-based creators of *Gogs* (Sat BBC2), Deni Morris and Michael Mort, were apparently invited to "talks" by Steven Spielberg after he saw this new five-part animated series about a prehistoric family. (We have yet to hear what happened next.) It's being touted as a Britain's answer to *The Simpsons*, but I should forget all about that: the animation is clever, but the humour is crude and the characters are hindered by only being able to grunt instead of talk. The new *101 Dalmatians* has similar problems with its doggie characters, by all accounts.

American Visions (Sun BBC2) finds the USA emerging from the Second World War as a superpower, and its art fragmenting into the Beat and Pop movements, producing the likes of Warhol, Pollock and Rothko. *Travels with My Camera* (Sun C4) has DJ John Peel crusing the autobahns of Germany and meeting some of the people who have tuned into his broadcasts for British Forces radio over the years – civilian Germans to the man and woman.

The big match

Aston Villa v Wimbledon

Sun 3pm Sky Sports 1

Vinny Jones (above) will be in a penitent mood after being fined for his piece of jovial leg-pulling in last Saturday's Sun – so Aston Villa's frontmen had better be at their most evasive. The *Crazy Gang* are the shock troops of this year's Premiership, and they are currently sitting in at third. Villa, meanwhile, should have their own bad boy back on duty – as their goalie, Mark Bosnich (the of the Nazi-style salute), returns from an ankle injury.

Saturday television and radio

BBC 1

- 7.05 *The Pink Panther* (1990/89). * 7.20 *News and Weather* (5/6/1841). * 7.30 *Children's BBC: The Dwellers*. 7.40 *Speed Racer*. 8.05 *Alvin and the Chipmunks*. 8.30 *The New Adventures of Superman*.
- 9.15 *Love and Kicking*. Zoe Ball and Jamie Theakston introduce *Thatcherville* popstars Spice Girls, Esther Rantzen and Heartbreak High's Sebastian Gorkispink (S) (3495/595).
- 12.12 *Weather* (7224/763).
- 12.15 *Grandstand*. 12.20 *Football Focus*. 1.00 News. 1.05 *Racing from Ascot*: the 1.10 *The MITTE Group Kennel Gates Novices Hurdle Race*. 1.20 *Swimming*: action from the British Short-Course Championships at Pond's Forge in Sheffield. 1.40 *Racing*: the 1.45 *The Long Walk Hurdle Race*. 1.55 *Swimming*: continued coverage from Pond's Forge. 2.10 *Racing*: the 2.20 *The Betterware Cup (Handicap Steeplechase)*. 2.35 *Sliding*: highlights from the Men's Downhill from Val Gardena in Italy. 2.50 *Showjumping*: coverage of the Volvo World Cup qualifier at Olympia. 4.40 *Final Score* (45700686).
- 5.20 *News and Weather* (5810131). *
- 5.30 *Regional News and Sport* (556421).
- 5.35 *The Simpsons Christmas Special*. Homer decides to earn extra cash by becoming a department store Father Christmas (S) (849082). *
- 6.00 *Jim Davidson's Generation Game* (S) (70792). *
- 7.00 *Noel... and the Winner Is*. Noel Edmonds presents quiz to "ordinary people" who have done bizarre or comical things over the year: Eddie Izzard, Susan George, Bobby Davro, Frank Carson, Carol Vorderman and Louise have all been persuaded to take part (S) (472131).
- 7.50 *The National Lottery Live*. No Mercy perform their new single (S) (163315). *
- 8.05 *Casually*. The Holly Christmas party (theme: James Bond) and Jude has to break her news to Matt (S) (640266). *
- 9.00 *Goodnight Sweetheart*. In the absence of Ian Hislop's political satire, *Gobbol* (its storyline about "mad turkey disease" was deemed unsuitable for airing during the current E. coli outbreak in Scotland), a double-bill of the time-travel sitcom (S) (2790353). *
- 9.50 *Birds of a Feather* (R) (S) (343547)*
- 10.20 *News and Sport* (Followed by *Weather*) (781976).
- 10.34 *National Lottery Update* (470131).
- 10.35 *Match of the Day*. Everton v Leeds United is the main event (5) (1786179). *
- 11.40 *The Stand-up Show* (S) (577353).
- 12.15 *Top of the Pops* (R) (S) (66377). *
- 12.45 *Wiz* (Sidney Lumet 1978 US). Stagnant updated version of *The Wizard of Oz*, featuring an all-black cast. Diana Ross is Dorothy (now a schoolteacher in Harlan), Michael Jackson is the Scarecrow and Richard Pryor is the Wiz (85566613).
- 2.55 *Weather* (8724342). To 3.00am.

BBC 2

- 7.05 *Miracle on Main Street* (Steve Seelye 1940 US). A depressed cabaret dancer discovers an abandoned baby on Christmas Eve. Walter Abel and Margo are the stars (S070599).
- 8.20 *Peter Ibbetson* (Henry Hathaway 1935 US). Very odd and strangely memorable adaptation of a George Du Maurier story in which two lovers, Gary Cooper (alive but in jail) and Ann Harding (dead but in heaven) communicate in dreams. The surrealists loved it, apparently (3545495). *
- 9.45 *Sports Review of the Year*, 1996. Another chance to watch last Sunday's goings on (S) (491402). *
- 11.45 *Film 96* with Barry Norman. *Bazza* on Erva – from last Monday (181808). *
- 12.15 *Captain Horatio Hornblower* (Raoul Walsh 1951 UK). Gregory Peck plays CS Forester's Napoleonic War naval hero (S1 6808).
- 2.10 *The Big Country* (William Wyler 1958 US). Gregory Peck again, this time as a peace-loving Easterer who steps into a wild west cattle country defeat. Decent stuff, although – in the cinema, at least – the human drama is somewhat swallowed up by the vast panoramas of the south-western United States (S0818995).
- 4.50 *TOTP 2* (S) (1701012).
- 5.35 *Gluck, Gluck, Gluck*. Malcolm Gluck recommends good value wines for Christmas (S) (555131).
- 6.05 *The Cat Show*. The National Cat Club's centennial show at Olympia (S) (2397082).
- 6.55 *Affairs to Remember* (S) (696808).
- 7.00 *Christmas in Vienna*. Concert of traditional and modern seasonal music from Vienna. Plácido Domingo and, er, Michael Bolton join China's leading soprano, Ying Huang (S) (5889).
- 8.00 *What the Papers Say*. Steve Crawshaw of the *Independent* reviews the press (S) (763599).
- 8.10 *Enterprise Culture Revisited*. A fresh soup supplier and a venture capitalist and how they've fared since the high days of Thatcherism (S) (439247).
- 8.50 *Gogs*. See Preview, above (S) (204242). *
- 9.00 *Musicals, Great Musicals*. See Preview, above (S) (6105421).
- 10.25 *On the Town* (Gene Kelly, Stanley Donen 1949 US). Partly filmed on the streets of New York (revolutionary, then, for an MGM musical), producer Arthur Freed revamped the charming and sophisticated Broadway show about three sailors (Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Julius Munnish) with 24 hours' shore-leave in Manhattan. The result is a bit on the over-hearty side (S585179).
- 12.00 *The Second Greatest Story Ever Told*. Drama set in 1960 and starring Mira Sorvino as a nice New York Jewish girl who takes a day trip to Coney Island and ends up with an immaculate conception. Malcolm McDowell co-stars (4061803). *
- 12.50 *RE Road Movie*. The gloomy American rock superstars in concert in Georgia (S) (3706006).
- 1.55 *Weather* (8012716). To 2.00am.
- REGIONS: Wales. 4.50 *The Car's the Star*. 5.10 *Gluck, Gluck, Gluck*. 5.40 Wales on Saturday. 5.50 *News* (S7025). To 6.00am.

ITV/London

- 6.00 *GMTV: 6.00 News*. 6.10 *Mole in the Hole*. 6.30 *Professor Bubble*. 6.50 *Barney and Friends*. 7.20 *Bug Alert*. 7.45 *Disney's Wake Up in the Wild Room*. 8.55 *Gangsters* (S763422).
- 9.25 *Cartoon Time* (S937359).
- 9.35 *Never a Dull Moment* (Yvette Paris 1967 US). Not strictly true, as dull Disney comedy has failed actor Dick Van Dyke being mistaken for a gangster. Edward G Robinson co-stars but can't really help (553876).
- 11.30 *The Chart Show* (S) (19334).
- 12.30 *Champions of the Future* (57841).
- 1.00 *News, Weather* (82971682). *
- 1.05 *Local News, Weather* (82970957). *
- 1.10 *Cartoon Time* (S2298415).
- 1.20 *Movies, Games and Videos* (S0303247).
- 1.30 *The Making of Evita* (S1 15995).
- 2.45 *Splash!* (Ron Howard 1984 US). Likeable, almost excellent fantasy in which Tom Hanks is saved from drowning by mermaid Daryl Hannah and falls in love with her. John Candy is let of the leash as Hank's playboy brother and Eugene Levy does a good comic turn as a nutty professor involved in the sub-plot (S) (776505). *
- 4.45 *News and Results* (Then Weather) (8589860). *
- 5.05 *Local News, Sport, Weather* (867334). *
- 5.20 *Cartoon Time* (S612588).
- 5.30 *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (179).
- 6.00 *Gladiators* (S) (658601). *
- 7.00 *Bind Date* (S) (2315).
- 8.00 *Family Fortunes* (S) (1082). *
- 8.30 *News, Weather* (944537). *
- 8.44 *Weather* (131537).
- 8.45 *Romancing the Stone* (Robert Zemeckis 1984 US). Off-screen comedy adventure in which romantic novelist Kathleen Turner gets involved in the sort of story she is only used to dreaming up – being chased around South America by fanatical generals and drug barons. Michael Douglas's coat (S) (291599).
- 10.45 *Jack Dee's Christmas Show*. Pulp and Lily Savage are the guests (S) (905792). *
- 11.30 *St Elmo's Fire* (Joel Schumacher 1985 US). A sort of twenty-something *Big Chill*, which follows seven college graduates as they face the trials and tribulations of the adult world. Brat-pickers Rob Lowe, Demi Moore, Andrew McCarthy, Emilio Estevez and Andie MacDowell star (S59995). *
- 12.00 *The Second Greatest Story Ever Told*. Drama set in 1960 and starring Mira Sorvino as a nice New York Jewish girl who takes a day trip to Coney Island and ends up with an immaculate conception. Malcolm McDowell co-stars (4061803). *
- 12.50 *RE Road Movie*. The gloomy American rock superstars in concert in Georgia (S) (3706006).
- 1.55 *Weather* (8012716). To 2.00am.
- 3.30 *The Chart Show* (S) (8285613).
- 4.25 *Spooks Run Wild* (Phil Rose 1941 US). Mock horror vehicle for the exhausted East Side Kids finds them sent away to summer camp, where they encounter Nazi spy rings and Bela Lugosi in his creepy country mansion (2191174).
- 5.30 *News* (S7025). To 6.00am.

Channel 4

- 6.00 *Early Morning: Sesame Street* (R) (68266).
- 7.00 *The Magic School Bus* (R) (S) (93353).
- 7.30 *Really Wild Animals* (1344976).
- 7.55 *Hong Kong Phooey* (R) (4481624).
- 8.10 *King Arthur and the Knights of Justice* (R) (7747044).
- 8.35 *Horace* (S) (6778976).
- 9.00 *The Morning Line* (S) (91628).
- 10.00 *Gazzetta Football Italia* (78044).
- 11.00 *Blitz* (S) (8808).
- 12.00 *Sign On* (S) (22841).
- 12.30 *Inside the Vatican*. The Inquisition, Mussolini and other skeletons in the Vatican cupboard (R) (S) (3030382). *
- 1.20 *The Living Sea* (S) (3008189).
- 1.50 *Lust for Life* (Vincenzo Minnelli 1956 US). Ambitious, thoughtful and a touch dull – Kirk Douglas plays Vincent Van Gogh, slowly going mad in the French countryside, as Minnelli takes less liberties than most Hollywood directors with the Dutch master's biography. James Donald plays his brother, Theo, and an interesting cast also includes Pamela Brown, Anthony Quinn and Udo Jürgens (S) (8408860). *
- 4.05 *The Lie Detectives*. Repeat *Witness* film about private detectives (R) (S) (4951656). *
- 5.05 *Brookside Omnibus* (S) (4594856).
- 6.30 *Right to Reply*. Access programme hosted by Roger Bolton, who invites disengaged viewers to confront programme-makers in the studio (S) (686). *
- 7.00 *News Summary and Weather* (827841).
- 7.05 *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (Terry Gilliam 1989 UK). The ex-Python's inventive, effects-heavy recounting of the picturesque tall tales of the eponymous 18th-century wanderer. John Neville takes the lead, voyaging to a city on the moon and Vulcan's foundry inside Mount Erebus, by way of the stomach of a monster fish. Eric Idle, Urry Thurman, Oliver Reed, Jonathan Pryce and an uncredited Robin Williams co-star (7149131). *
- 9.25 *ER*. Greene is sued for malpractice, and it's wedding bells for Hathaway and Taglieri (R) (S) (351976).
- 10.20 *Bandit Queen* (Shekhar 1994 IND). Powerful but muddled telling of the story of the female Indian bandit, Phoolan Devi – disowned by Devi herself and banned by the Indian authorities. Seema Biswas plays the low-caste avenger, spreading terror through Uttar Pradesh in the 1980s (S) (2470735).
- 12.35 *Life Licence: Introduction* (7072483).
- 1.36 *Sting in Oslo*. Greatest hits from the Norwegian capital, circa 1994 (R) (14230648).
- 2.40 *The New Twilight Zone*. A department-store Santa is sacked on Christmas Eve... (S) (4528657).
- 3.05 *Mr Don and Mr George* (R) (S) (82479377).
- 3.35 *The Real World* (S) (8351754). To 4.30pm.

ITV/Regions

- ANGLIA**
As London except: 12.30pm Movies, Games and Videos (57841). 1.10 *Anglia Air Watch* (6297163). 1.10 Film: *The Blithe Showdown* (6054889). 5.04 *Anglia Air Watch* (6834711). 1.25pm Film: *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* (632071). 5.00-5.30am International Touring Cars (39716).
- CENTRAL**
As London except: 12.30pm Movies, Games and Videos (57841). 1.10 *Eastern Express* (61084). 1.10 *Airport* (615995). 5.10 Central Match - Goals Match (5977334). 5.30am Central Goal (61701). 5.30-5.30am International Touring Cars (39716).
- WIRRAL**
As London except: 12.30pm Movies, Games and Videos (57841). 1.10 *House of Cards* (7306132). 1.10 *Wales: The Electric Chair* (30086334). 1.45 *Wales: Touring Cars* (21092686). 1.45 *West: Naked Games* (6857599). 2.10 *Wales: Knight Rider* (628422).
- 2.45 West: World of Wonder** (7229761). 3.15 *Film: Arrested Sevens Christmas* (655976). 3.25am Film: *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* (673396). 3.20am Film: *Code Name: Zebra* (632071). 5.00-5.30am International Touring Cars (39716).
- WEST COUNTRY**
As London except: 12.30pm Movies, Games and Videos (57841). 1.10 *Blonde Showdown* (6054889). 1.25pm Film: *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* (673396). 3.20am Film: *Code Name: Zebra* (632071). 5.00-5.30am International Touring Cars (39716).
- 9.00**
As London except: 10.00am *Reelies* (52518). 10.30 *New GameMaster* (44889). 12.30 *Motorwatch* (69771). 1.00pm *Loco Planet* (6295618). 1.45 Film: *The Black Swan* (40874179). 3.20 Film: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (19310686). 6.30 *The Real Holiday Show* (686). 7.00 *News* (476131). 7.15 *Nosferatu* (3612995). 8.20 *Chevalier Yv Nih N Nog* (9

Unsung heroes who filter out the sleaze

Regulators – they sound like the heroes of a high plains Western, all leather coats and smoking six guns. The reality is, of course, rather more prosaic. These people rejoice in such unwieldy titles as Director General, Office of Telecommunications. They inhabit drab standard-issue offices and – no offence – they tend to be somewhat less than charismatic. And yet, if “opposition” means the scrutiny and checking of established power, they are some of the most important opposition figures in Britain. They are more aggressive and outspoken than many Labour or Liberal Democrat front-benchers. And, of course, they have much more power.

So, perhaps not surprisingly, the public has come to invest trust in the regulatory offices created since privatisations of gas, water, rail and more recently, the lottery. In general, and certainly during the past week, the signs are that that trust has not been misplaced. On digital television, Don Cruickshank, head of Ofte, looks like he will make the best of the hand dealt him by the sloppy policy-makers of the Department of Trade and Industry. John Swift, the rail regulator, fiercely denounced Railtrack's under-investment. His record is far from perfect but there has to be a warm welcome for his readiness to dig for information and pass it on – as of this week, Railtrack is on notice.

These are performances government and its officials say they are happy with. But they say

it through gritted teeth. “Independence” is never really popular in the corridors of Whitehall. The rest of us have begun, in a quiet way, to take the regulators’ freedom for granted. Yet, if we stand back for a moment, and consider their brief history, this power is a remarkable thing. Regulation and bureaucracy were what Mrs Thatcher pledged herself to cutting. It was not that long ago Lord Young of Grahamb was setting up a Deregulation Unit to produce White Papers with long lists of rules to be rescinded. In fact, when it came to it, people were found to be rather keen on health and safety at work. Even staunch Conservative voters were unenthusiastic about repealing the rules on development control and land use. (In a contest between ideological deregulators and Nimbys, the latter always win hands down.)

Today’s regulators represent a further step – the return of powerful and popular bureaucrats. Why did the Conservatives tolerate this? Simply because, having privatised some of the most politically sensitive services, without properly breaking up the resulting monopolies, they were scared stiff of what companies and voters would say if they felt cheated or abused. So far, an interesting lesson in the political limitations of radical Toryism. But the shape of the regulatory offices looks odder still when we consider how personal and discretionary they are. This is against the ideology of the past 17 years in a serious way. For instance, Friedrich



Hayek was one of Lady Thatcher’s gurus. He was a root and branch antagonist of giving officials a lot of personal discretion – that really was, he argued, the road to serfdom. Yet here we have Ms Spottiswoode in gas, Professor Littlechild in electricity, Mr Bryant in water and Mr Cruickshank in telecoms making individual and sometimes idiosyncratic judgements about price levels, competition and industrial structures – all very important political questions.

For democrats, the regulatory offices leave much to be desired. Notoriously accountable to Parliament, the regulators have only to produce an annual report and turn up, if they care to, in response to select committee requests. They are effectively immune from Parliamentary scrutiny. Their judgements are, it is true, subject to inspection by the courts in judicial review and by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. But all the courts can do is determine that their personal judgements were exercised after due care and deliberation. As for the MMC, it too is an odd animal – a quango made up of political appointees which is supposed to be fair and independent. As for the regulators’ relations with ministers and Whitehall, well, they ought to be prickly and suspicious. Sir James Mackinnon at gas set a good example here – a regulator’s honesty correlates with the degree of discontent among civil servants.

For all those ambiguities of structure the regulatory offices work quite well. Even more

important, the regulators command public confidence. When on Thursday Mr Cruickshank did the media round explaining how he plans to monitor Rupert Murdoch’s control of the entry point for digital signals into the home, he sounded rather like the people’s champion. Goliath may be big but David’s footwork looks nifty; he may even have a pebble or two in his pouch. As for Mr Swift at the Office of Rail Regulation, he has turned out to be a source of vital information – for example, about investment levels – which even Labour in its cautious pre-election mode will surely find it hard not to exploit. Assessing these complex privatised companies requires, above all, huge amounts of technical information. We have never needed such activist regulation more.

So they are imperfect, sit unhappily in democratic life and are at odds with the prevailing ideology of Conservative Britain. Even the regulators’ independence cannot be taken for granted. With government gongs and subtle hints about team playing, let alone the ever-present risk of “capture” by the industry under regulation, the system is fraught with inducements to bend. Yet, more by luck than design, the regulatory offices have become high offices of state. They have, overall, confounded the critics. So, what are we saying – that this is a happy political story, something successful, even cheering? Well, yes, slightly to our own surprise, we are. It is, after all, the season for optimism.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Forget Christmas, and have a merry pagan Winter Solstice festival

Sir: Two articles decrying the way we celebrate Christmas were published on 19 December. One was by a prominent hardline atheist, Richard Dawkins, the other by a prominent liberal Christian, Don Cupitt.

Both have missed the point of Christmas: that it is not primarily a Christian event, and never has been. It is the pagan festival of the winter solstice, already thousands of years old when Christianity arrived on the scene. The ancient druids celebrated the rebirth of the sun; the Greeks made it the birthday of Zeus; the Romans debased it and called it Saturnalia; the Jews attached it to the rebirth of their religion after it had been “killed” by the Syrians; the Christians turned it into Christmas; the birthday, and nowadays it is used to celebrate consumerism.

What of it? Christmas is what Professor Dawkins would call a successful “meme”, an idea that shows great adaptability and Durwinian fitness. When consumerism declines and another religion rises in its place (as will surely happen one day), Christmas will find a way of attaching itself to that, too. After all, it has even transplanted itself to Australia, changing itself into a summer-

solstice celebration. A festival that could survive that could survive anything.

RUPERT LEE
London SW14

Sir: Richard Dawkins is doubly wrong (“Who needs a euphemism for Christmas?”, 19 December).

The current tendency to turn Christmas into a syncretic “holiday season” involves not so much an evasive betrayal of the Nativity as a restoration of the midwinter festival to its pagan origins before it was hijacked by the Christians in the fourth century.

Five elements of the traditional Christmas have much to do with the stories in Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospels, and most come from popular customs from various cultures.

Anyway, isn’t it good to have a festival which can appeal to everyone?

And young children can and do have theological opinions, and may indeed be atheists. Having been brought up in an atheist family, I certainly knew by the time I went to school that there were no gods, any more than fairies or ghosts or angels. The same was true of many children I knew then, and also of my own children. Anyway, aren’t all children atheists, until they are told otherwise?

In this context, the imposition of religious drama on schoolchildren is surely as objectionable as the imposition of religious worship, however eclectic or syncretic its content, despite the common practice of Nativity plays, the co-operation of teachers and parents, the approval of religious and educational leaders, and your editorial endorsement (leading article, 20 December). It cannot help involving indoctrination, which Richard Dawkins rightly condemns, as well as widespread embarrassment for believers in other religions or atheism.

MUCH that Dawkins said about attitudes to Christmas I heartily endorse, but he seems to gloss that the atheist is the calm, sensible thinker who won’t have truck with muddle or hypocrisy. It is a little more complicated than that.

The Rev KEVIN O’DONNELL
Crowthorne, Berkshire

Sir: I was most concerned to read the report on charity card sales (18 December). If I had been able to speak to your reporter, I would have assured her that I would take immediate steps to check the charity cards in all our branches and to remove any offenders from sale. This has now been done.

The amount that goes to the charity from each sale is, of course, set by the publisher and not the retailer, but our customers can be assured that we take the subject very seriously. Books etc is known as an ethical company and our directors will shortly be conducting an investigation into this whole area.

Christmas cards have become a substantial source of income for many reputable charities – we sell cards which benefit Oxfam among others – and I hope that people will not be deterred from buying all charity cards and so adversely affect their income at this important time.

RICHARD JOSEPH
Group Chief Executive
Books etc Ltd
London WC2

Sir: May I, as a very small card publisher, comment on your article “Card retailers are charity Scrooges”.

For the publisher who has to produce cards more cheaply at Christmas (achieved only by large runs) the charity sums donated may be fairly generous when compared with the profit margin. The sum of 30p in the pound, as suggested by Nigel Griffiths, is unrealistic.

It should be remembered that some charity shops selling Christmas cards who give the largest proportion to charity are not commercial retailers and therefore do not have the full retail and staff costs to meet. ELIZABETH MANSON BAHR
Bizzie Lizzie Cards
Oxford

LETTER from THE EDITOR

M

arketing men go about ideal target market readers – broadly speaking, those among you who, having the largest amount of spending money and the least sense, appeal most to advertisers. Some papers take this more seriously than others.

Years ago on *The Economist*, I remember being exhorted, half-seriously, by some marketing gurus to go up to any badly dressed or impoverished-looking person who happened to be reading the paper, and snatch it away; they would rather have had fewer, high-income readers than more readers who would dilute the “quality”.

Well, one thing that can be confidently said about *The Independent* is that we have a more exclusive readership than certain other papers. (I could cope with it being a little less exclusive, but that’s another story.) In fact, all newspapers have heterodox readerships – there are, no doubt, *Mirror*-reading duchesses and labourers who take the *Financial Times*.

This week, though, I was going to Manchester by train when a seriously dangerous-looking man sat down opposite me. He had, I think it’s safe to say, more metal stuck through his face than you’d find on a Fifties Chevrolet, spiked hair and a new scar.

As I tried to avoid his eye, and shifted uneasily in my seat, he reached into his bag, drew out... an *Independent*, turned to the comment pages and began (I think) with the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s article on European integration, which he studied with utter absorption. People aren’t what they seem – (not a bad motto for journalism, or anything else).

Incidentally, the *daler* is still visible in the name for a two-and-a-half guilder coin, the *Rijksdaalder*, popularly known as the *Rix*. BERNARD NOBLE
The Hague

Sir: About the dollar. Both Mr Mangels and Professor Poppe (letters, 19 December) convincingly link the \$ sign to the Spanish “piece of eight” or peso, but differ in that the first sees it in the figure 8 while the second reads it as a squashed up “ps”.

Presumably there is evidence for both explanations. However, I lean towards Mr Mangels, because the Dutch way of writing an 8 is to begin at the waist, not at the top, and to end up with the shape of a stencilled “S”. I would expect this to be a standard usage in pre-independence New York, originally coloured by the Dutch. Some form of cancellation would be needed to distinguish the sign from succeeding figures, hence the bar.

Incidentally, the *daler* is still visible in the name for a two-and-a-half guilder coin, the *Rijksdaalder*, popularly known as the *Rix*.

BERNARD NOBLE
The Hague

Sir: The Spanish American dollar, or silver piece of eight, *reales* was the principal unit of currency and account used in North America prior to US independence, and was adopted by Congress as the unit of currency in 1792, after which all US dollars were minted in 1794 (letters, 17, 18, 19 December).

The reverse of the Spanish dollar bore two vertical columns, representing the Pillars of Hercules, each wrapped with an S-shaped scroll bearing part of the motto *ne plus ultra*. This was supposedly used as a convenient abbreviation in accounts, in North, Central, and South America.

ROBERT COOK
London W1

even the Queen’s husband. Our Island Story would be a considerably shorter and duller tale were it not for the citizens’ inalienable right to stand up and make a complete idiot of themselves in public. Judging by the frequency with which he exercises that right, Citizen Philip understands this full well.

Another theme of this week, as so many other weeks, has been food and drink, and what it does to our bodies. (Apart from keeping them going, of course – a side-effect of fat and sugar consumption that many “health” researchers underestimate.) We have had questions raised about genetically altered soya, about lamb, and about

As I tried to avoid the dangerous-looking man’s eye, he reached into his bag, and drew out... an *Independent*

the *E. Coli* affair, whose 13th victim died and which has so far made 163 people ill.

These stories seem to have become as endemic as some of the conditions they describe, simply another part of modern life. Some “scars” are now known to be very hard fact – the cancer-smoking link above all. Others are possibilities, “early warning science” about chances of ill-health at the margin. And about these we must all make personal decisions.

My personal limit was reached this week on the revelation that malt whisky contains more cancer-inducing agents than other whiskies. Worse still, Laphroaig, the wonderful Islay malt, has the highest content of something described as PAH. Pah, indeed!

Laphroaig is the peat-scented, life-enhancing, ultimate fluid, without which life itself is a meaningless void. It is the peer of malts, the very milk of nature. I have a bottle waiting for Christmas week. I hope all readers have as happy a time as I will while disposing of it.

Andrew Marr

QUOTE UNQUOTE

Political leadership is like being a teacher. It’s about changing the language of others. I say it and go on saying it until I hear the man in the pub saying my words back to me – John Hume, leader of Ulster’s SDLP party

I don’t wear women’s clothes. I wear my clothes – Eddie Izzard, *Comedian*

I do not believe in this pairing system. I regard it as organised truancy – Dennis Skinner, *Labour MP*, on the Commons voting row

I don’t expect Labour to welcome these figures. Whenever the sun shines, they pray for rain – John Major, *when the unemployment figures fell below the 2 million mark*

Democracy is a good thing in moderation – Peter Luff, *Conservative MP*

A judge’s life is a desperate attempt to keep your head below the parapet – Mr Justice Roager

Thoughts of marriage and children are far off. Perhaps I will become a nun, who knows? – Liz Hurley

When we look to Eastern spirituality for help, why not start by looking at Christianity, which was born in the Middle East? – Dr Patrick Sookdeo, *Director of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity*

The trouble with the rat race is, even if you win, you are still a rat – Cher, *pop singer*



In mourning: a woman placing flowers on a memorial to the victims in Grozny yesterday. Photograph: Reuter

Barbaric killing of Red Cross workers

Sir: Yesterday was an international day of mourning for the six Red Cross workers murdered in Chechnya. The killing of these innocent volunteers, whilst they slept in their beds at a hospital, has appalled the international community.

These murders are unprecedented in the history of the humanitarian movement. This is not an issue of security, but of barbarism. Even within

the local context of the savage war in Chechnya, the murders make no sense. Whatever the motive, none of the warring parties can possibly extract any serious advantage from them. The consequences of this event go far beyond Chechnya. Such an attack ruthlessly undermines the position of the International Red Cross as one of the most neutral of agencies, and affects all of us who strive so hard to provide humanitarian aid. Most of all it affects people in terrible need throughout the world.

As one of the few humanitarian agencies active in Chechnya, we have lost six personal friends as well as colleagues. We knew the value of their work in helping civilians caught up in the war. We understood and shared the noble humanitarian ideal for which they have lost their lives.

And we would like to express our profound condolences to their families and colleagues.

DR CHRISTOPHER BESSON
on behalf of the staff and volunteers at
Medical Emergency Relief
International (Merlin)
London W1

Illiterateness

Sir: Television and radio weather forecasters seem determined to invent a language of their own. To complement the nouns “fog”, “sleet”, “mist”, “cloud” and so on there are the adjectives “foggy”, “sleety”, “misty”, “cloudy”. It is ridiculous to add “-ness” to each of these to give “fogginess”, “sleetiness”, “mistiness”, “cloudiness”. Where will it end?

Sunshineness? Thunderiness?

Hurricaneness?

LOIS REYNOLDS
Hathersage, Derbyshire

Sir: Perhaps the Duke of Edinburgh might like to consider the implications of replacing the bullet-proof glass in the royal cars with cricket netting.

MARIE NEIL
Oxford

Sir: With reference to “Motorists driven round bend by poor road signs” (16 December), I hope readers noticed where the “poor signs” in the photograph were. Every single one was on a pole in the pavement?

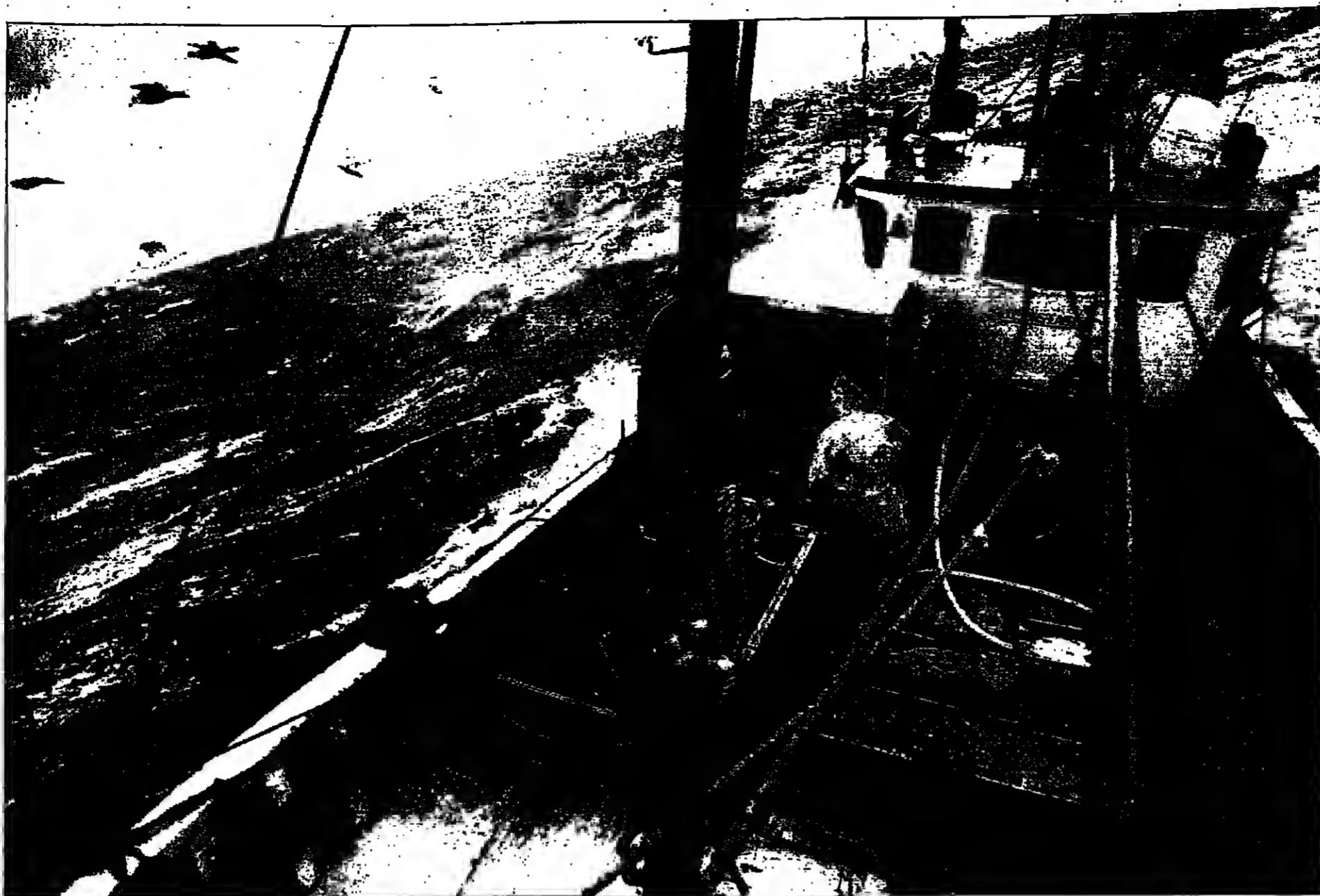
Pedestrians have to put up not only with filthy, exhaust-polluted air,

inconveniently placed, time-wasting “pedestrian crossings”, and the noise and lights of constant traffic. We are also forced to share our footways with increasing numbers of signs dedicated to easing life for drivers. When will authorities stop regarding the car as king of the public highway, and give walking due recognition as the most widely used and least polluting form of transport?

Councillor S.D. DHALL
Oxfordshire CC, Green Party
Oxford

Letters should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, *The Independent*, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL. (Fax: 0171-293 2656; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk) and include a daytime telephone number.

Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret we are unable to acknowledge unpublished letters.

Fishing for trouble? A Northern Irish boat goes for its quota off the coast of Ireland
Photograph: Crispin Rodwell/Reuters

Foreign vessels are legally taking a large chunk of the UK's fishing quota. But it is our own government's double-think and double-talk that is to blame rather than the minefield of EU rules, says John Lichfield

Take a typical fisherman's tale of claim and counter-claim, disputed figures and outright distortions. Add a rich tartar sauce of Euro-phobia. You have a bouillabaisse of a row on fishing quotas, cuts in the British trawler fleet and, most of all, "quota-hoppers" - Spanish and Dutch boats flying British flags and catching part of the EU fish stocks allocated to Britain.

Hostilities resumed, briefly, this week. They will be rejoined in earnest when EU fisheries ministers meet again in April.

The ministers agreed in the early hours of yesterday on catch quotas for next year, which despite scientific recommendation for steep cuts are only a little below this year's figures. But this was just a skirmish; the real battles lie ahead.

The Government is still blocking agreement on restructuring (ie, reducing) all EU fishing fleets. It is refusing to agree any of the wider EU treaty reforms under discussion in the Inter-Governmental Conference unless "quota-hopping" is declared unconstitutional under European law.

Arcane as it sounds to the urban, chattering and non-seafaring classes, fish may

replace mad cow disease, and rival the single currency, as the main Euro-battleground in the run-up to the general election.

It is also one Euro-dispute in which Labour says it will be just as tough as the Tories if Tony Blair wins in the spring.

Who is right and who is wrong? Does it matter?

On the face of it, Britain has a good case. It is an undisputed fact that 150 large UK fishing vessels, about a fifth of the tonnage of the British fleet, are Spanish- and Dutch-owned and crewed. They deliver their catches direct to Spain or Holland or land their fish at British ports for shipment by freezer truck to their home countries. The vessels carry British flags and British fishing licences, so their catches are counted against the British quota.

Manifestly unfair? The British Government (having for many years defended, and even encouraged, the practice) decided in 1988 that it was unacceptable. It passed a law requiring three-quarters of the shareholders of British trawler-owning companies to be British. Three years later, the law was quashed by the European Court as contrary to EU rules on freedom of movement of people and capital.

This was inevitable; it was a manifestly discriminatory piece of legislation. Even British officials admit in private that it was a clumsy law. On the other hand, the fact that foreign vessels (in all but flag) can take up to 46 per cent of a British fishing industry, already "decimated" by the EU fisheries policy.

In fact, the British fishing fleet has not been damaged by the Common Fisheries Policy. The middle-distance and inshore fleets, which are covered by the EU policy, increased in size for most of the Eighties and have started to decline rapidly only in the past few years (when fish stocks all over the world have been under severe pres-

sure). If you exclude the quota-hoppers from the UK figures, the decline is steeper. But the economics of fish is local and variable. Some British ports and some types of vessel have done very well indeed. Huge sums are being paid by British fishermen at this moment, for new super-trawlers.

The demise of the huge trawler ports, such as Hull, Grimsby and Lowestoft, often blamed on Brussels, was caused by the Icelandic and Norwegian cod wars of the Sixties and Seventies. Those two nations extended their fisheries limits to 12, then 50, then 200 miles, ejecting our traditional, long-distance trawler fleets from once-rich hunting grounds for cod and haddock. This had nothing to do with the EU. Euro-sceptics who argue that Britain should join the Icelanders and declare our own 200-mile limit are arguing, in effect, for withdrawal from the EU. It would be politically impossible to squeeze the fish paste back into the tube in any other way.

There can be no doubt that the Common Fisheries Policy has miserably failed to deliver

paying off British boats would be deducted from the celebrated Thatcher cash-back scheme, which reduces Britain's net budget deficit with the EU. The Government preferred to spend both its money, and the EU money, in other ways. Fisheries were not a priority.

This is complex but it is vital to an understanding of quota-hoppers. In the early Eighties, there were a couple of dozen. Their numbers exploded during the decade. Why? Because British trawler owners sold their boats to the Spanish and Dutch. Or in some cases they sold them to British brokers, who sold them to the Spanish and Dutch. Why? Because they were offering the best price.

The main alternative - EU scrapping grants - were not on offer in Britain. Why were the foreign skippers so keen to buy British boats? Because under British, not EU, regulations, if you bought the boat, you also got the licence to fish and a guaranteed share of the national quota.

It is a purely British government policy to break down the national quota boat by boat, and allow the sale of quotas, in this way. Other EU govern-

ments have other ways of enforcing (or in some cases failing to enforce) the Common Fisheries Policy.

There are quota-hoppers in other EU countries, a few dozen in Ireland, some in France and Denmark. But the greatest concentration is in Britain.

Spanish and Dutch "plunderers" bought their share of the British quota in good faith, exploiting, according to your viewpoint, EU single market law, the British Government's belief that everything has a price, or a loophole in the Common Fisheries Policy. They now, reasonably enough, claim that they have an inalienable right to carry on fishing.

EU officials say that there are several ways in which Britain could make life difficult for quota-hoppers and stay within EU law. Britain could, for instance, insist that all British fishing boats must land a proportion of their annual catch (say, 30 per cent) for sale or processing at a British port. Until now, the Government has declined to do this. Why? Because many Scottish boats, in particular, like to sell their catches directly to Spain or France, where prices for some species are much higher.

Alternatively, EU officials say the Government could introduce a law insisting that the crews of "British" fishing boats be covered by British social security and health insurance. This would drill several holes below the waterline of the economics of quota-hopping.

The Government has been reluctant to follow this up. Why? Because it would impose a new burden of regulation on British fishermen, as well as quota-hoppers. Many British fishing crews, who operate on a casual basis, would have to come fully into the social security system.

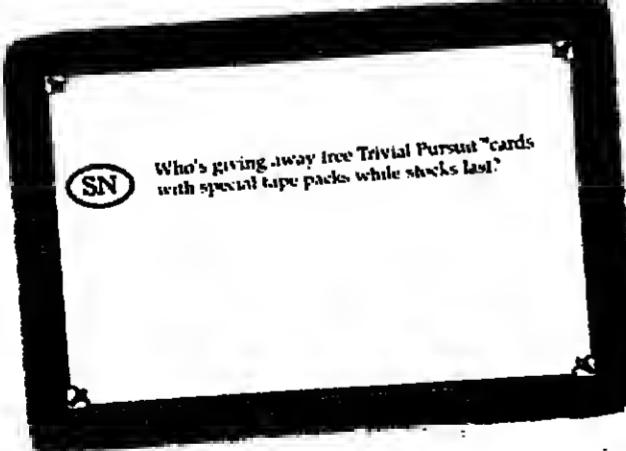
And so it goes on.

Is a solution possible? With good will, yes. But little good will exists between Britain and the EU at present. The Government appears to be changing its mind about introducing a British-boats-must-sell-some-fish-in-Britain rule. But it says that the rule should be enshrined in the EU constitution as part of the reforms of the treaties now under discussion.

This is silly, say Brussels officials. Such a law could be introduced in Britain within existing EU rules - as long as it applied to all boats, without discrimination. No treaty change is needed.

The suspicion is that the Government is no longer in the fish market for the kind of practical solutions that might help British fishermen. It is locked in a self-consciously Euro-sceptic posture, pandering to Euro-sceptic press and Tory backbenchers. The Government is right to fight for the interests of British fishermen. But, in this dispute, it has long since overfished its quota of red herring.

jo brand's week



Jeremy Irons has threatened to leave the country if no distributor is found for the version of *Lolita* in which he stars. The problem with making threats like these is that they sound rather petulant. I'm sure if I threatened to leave the country, very few people would give a toss apart from family and a few friends and maybe the local newsagent where I buy my cigarettes.

You eventually learn that however important you think you might be, nobody is indispensable. With that attitude, perhaps Mr Irons might like to consider the possibility of threatening to stay here instead. That may well piss more people off.

Tony Blair's musical taste has been much in evidence in the past few weeks following his appearance on *Desert Island Discs* and he now pops up in the Christmas issue of *New Musical Express* with his 10 top singles of the year. I have often thought that one of the drawbacks of having children is being forced to listen to their uniformed musical tastes, particularly when they are under the age of 12. Obviously, Mr Blair is no exception, which goes

some way to explaining why his family has wasted time discussing their favourite Spice Girl, a debate about as useful as judging politicians on their hairstyles.

Joe Public would be forgiven for thinking that almost everyone in public life is corrupt in some way, big or small. This week, Tony Whips have been accused of cheating the opposition over three votes and the ex-chief executive of English Heritage has been criticised for running up hundreds of pounds of expenses on a corporate charge card and getting his employer to pay him four grand for his old furniture. Maybe I should have done that when I worked in the NHS. They do seem to be short, particularly of beds. Meanwhile, in Germany, a seemingly well respected politician, loved by the public for her integrity, has allegedly been using armed forces planes to visit her daughter in Switzerland. Hardly nicking a couple of Birds from work, is it? It is much easier to stomach this type of behaviour from people who are just about scraping a living together. Perhaps the Government's

money might be better used weeding out their own charlatans, rather than setting up hotlines for people to grass up their neighbours who are only taking a leaf out of the book of their "elders and betters".

I have won an award this week, which I am being made to feel I should shut my ashtray mouth about. Forest, an organisation that supports people's right to smoke, has given me an award for "sticking steadfastly" to my right to smoke. Immediately, a letter appeared in this august publication condemning *The Independent*, because I have a tag in my hand in the above photo. Firstly, the wealth of anti-smoking stuff far outweighs anything I might be able to do with that tiny little

tube of delight in my hand. Secondly, perhaps I should just point out that in a recent survey of role models for young women, I came second only to Margaret Thatcher in my unsuitability as a role model for aforementioned ladies. Thirdly, I am sick to death of this American-style assault on smokers and I shall continue to smoke as much as possible, particularly in places where it will irritate po-faced health obsessives.

We learn this week that laughing is good for us. Phew! It's about time something pleasurable was good for us. It appears that if you drink more you laugh more, too. However, research psychologist Geoff Lowe says this isn't *carte blanche* for us to all rush out and get

blasted. Spoilsport. Might do it anyway.

When is Alzheimer's not Alzheimer's? Tricky question it would seem and certainly not one you could ask someone with Alzheimer's, because the thought processes of people with this terrible illness are not organised enough. However, an Alzheimer's-type illness was diagnosed in the case of Ernest Saunders, he of the Guiness fraud fame, who has now made a remarkable recovery and has been baking in the dash ever since he got off a longer prison sentence.

The European Court of Human Rights has decided that Mr S has been unfairly treated and he himself has been indignant when questioned about the nature of his illness. The point I'd like to make is that there are so many contradictory

approaches in psychiatry that you could get a psychiatrist to say almost anything you wanted them to. Mr Saunders may well be indignant. So are we. To us it looks as if he got off a long stretch. It's also tragic for all those people who, of course, don't recover from Alzheimer's, because it's incurable.

grub street

Politicians are made of the same clay as us; it's just that they almost always get found out

david aaronovitch

How many of your stories are really true? If you wrote down your 10 most frequently used anecdotes (my funny pranks, my first condom, the time I met the Queen, etc), and showed them to family and friends, would they be recognised as the unvarnished truth?

Stories get bigger with the telling, especially when recounted by people with imagination. They are embroidered with elaborate curlicues and populated with more interesting characters. And not just for the benefit of the listener, either. Pretty soon, they pass into one's own internal mythology – an irretrievably entangled mass of the real and the magical which is very unlikely ever to be challenged.

Unless, that is, you are a politician. We have come to the point in the electoral cycle when Des O'Connor's researchers telephone Tony Blair's office and invite him to submit himself to one of Des's rigorous policy examinations, sandwiched between a ventriloquist and Boyzone.

This is also the season for the three party leaders to be quizzed by the readers of *Good Housekeeping* (p54, just before "planning the perfect party" – so John Major should read on).

As a consequence of these appearances, we have learned two things this week, only to have them contested. The first (vouchsafed to Mr O'Connor) was the great Blair stowaway story, in which the adolescent Tony skips the train about to carry him back to his stuffy public school and attempts to fly off in a plane from Newcastle airport bound – he thinks – for the Bahamas.

No sooner had the show been recorded than the delighted Desnials circulated the world with a press release; the *Daily Mail* delved deep and discovered that there were no planes flying from Newcastle to the Bahamas in that decade (or, indeed, any other), and that Jersey was the most exotic destination on offer. Even a Scots public schoolboy of the late 1960s would have had difficulty in confusing the two. Ex, perhaps.

Conservative Central office were said to be "cock-a-hoop" about this Blair gaffe, until the second discovery of the week was also thrown into doubt.

This was Mr Major's



revelation that he calls his wife Norma his "little grub". Taxed with this while visiting Northern Ireland, she said "we don't have nicknames for each other. What rubbish!"

We do not yet know whether Labour is "cock-a-hoop" at Mrs Major's reputation of her husband, but it's quite probable that they are.

(Incidentally, also in *Good Housekeeping*, Paddy Ashdown is revealed as having locked his kindergarten teacher in a cupboard. So far, she has not contradicted him. But then, knowing Mr Ashdown, she's probably still there.)

Two things should concern us here. The first is the light these stories shed on our leaders. Did T Blair say "Bahamas" because he thought it sounded more dare-devil (ie, he's a dissenter), or because – long ago – that was what entered his own mythology (ie, he's like the rest of us)?

Do John and Norma disagree about little grub because she's appalled by the nickname and is fishing (incidentally, what nickname does she give him? Tiger, perhaps?) or – intriguingly – he has confused her with someone else (a previous girlfriend, possibly)?

I think that we ought to conclude that our political leaders are made of much the same clay as us; it's just that they almost always get found out. But should we also be worried that political discourse in this country is being debased by this concentration on trivia?

Do we agree with yesterday's *Times* editorial which argued – with the pomposity for which that publication is famed – "it would be desirable if politicians refrained from telling the voters so much about the journeys they have made in the past and so little about where they propose to take the country in the future"? This is the same publication that (on page 2) has an entire article devoted to the Bahamas/Little Grub story.

Maybe we should. Perhaps it would be best for politicians on Des O'Connor's show to reprove their genial host for his interest in things personal, reminding him that what viewers really care about is Labour's training policies. It might even keep the pop stars away from politics.

Art, a new play by the French writer Yasmina Reza, is packing them in at the Wyndham's ... indeed it's standing room only for this old-fashioned West End comedy about a Parisian dermatologist who buys a Minimalist white picture which upsets his relationships with his two best friends.

The three men are played by Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay and Ken Stott. The play is about theatre, not art, though Minimalism comes in for the expected middlebrow bashing.

Perhaps the scene the audience enjoys most comes right at the beginning. Finney, as the representative of *blunt common sense*, struggles not to say what he thinks of someone who's just spent 200,000 francs on a white painting – and fails. He has the audience round with him. It says a lot for Courtenay, the dermatologist, that he is able to bring the audience round, if not to his side, at least to thinking of him as something more than a mere sucker. But then the whole point of this sort of entertainment is to watch actors exercise their craft. Stott has the best speech, and delivers it superbly. In the old days we would have called it a feast of good acting.

I found myself thinking: what if the producers had been bolder, and had *Finney playing Paul Johnson*? The British audience would have enjoyed that, surely, even if it left the tourists puzzled. Stott, the intermediary figure who just wants the others to be nice to each other, could be one of the Sunday paper fence-sitters, too scared to say what he really thinks (always supposing he ever dares think at all). And Courtenay could be a friend of the Tate, who once had dinner with Doris Day, and is anxious not to be left behind.

But that would be another play, which might make the audience think about itself and its attitudes to art. In any case, the current London art scene is almost beyond satire. And I cannot imagine that any such play would make it to the stage of the National's Olivier theatre. One part of the British arts establishment would never dream of upsetting another. The Royal National Theatre, which wanted in its early days to put on a play attacking Churchill, has become a staid, respectable museum, devoted to reverent revivals.

It is a dreadful disappointment to those who supported its creation hoping for boldness, daring, innovation. Instead, it is safe, commercial, star-studded – exactly like the West End producers' theatre of Binkie Beaumont to which it was supposed to be the alternative.

Gays 'n' Dolls, the Broadway musical, is the National's latest offering. Jolly Jack Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* is an earlier example, precisely the sort of

popular play people agitated against in the Fifties and Sixties when the National was seen as our only hope for a serious theatre. Repertory theatres have been doing it for years. So why should the National decide to revive it in the Nineties? Because the National is run by and for directors and designers.

An Inspector Calls is an example of how our subsidised theatre, instead of showing the way forward, has gone back a hundred years to spectacle and superficiality. It was against such silliness that Granville-Barker and Shaw produced their seasons at the Royal Court from 1904–1907. They wanted to make the theatre a place an intelligent person would at least not be ashamed to be seen in. Famously, the Royal Court is now the home of the English Stage Company, founded by George Devine in 1956 as a writers' theatre, very much with Granville-Barker and Shaw in mind.

And who is the new head of the English Stage Company? Why, the director of *An Inspector Calls*. And did he celebrate his appointment with a wonderful new play? No, he revived Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen*, removing most of the theatre's seats in order to create a highly realistic restaurant kitchen.

It was a statement. Ours is a visual culture, it said; audiences reared on TV have to have naturalistic sets and everything made simple. And the audience duly coaxed and asked. Unkind people say that Stephen Daldry's ideal is a theatre so full of set that there's no room for an audience at all.

They can only stand outside and watch the flats going in and out of the fly-tower. A theatre in which design is king is no sort of theatre to me. In *John Gabriel Borkman*, another recent hit at the National, the designer wanted to emphasise the coldness of the house (not just psychologically – it's Norway, and

snowing outside) by siting the stove upstage centre. Fine. But he also wanted such a steep rake that the doors to Mrs Borkman's drawing room, in order to be practical, led in a deadly殉情 draught. Did the director query this absurdity? Clearly not – and he was Richard Eyre, Artistic Director of the National. This may seem a trivial example, but it's symptomatic of a deep disorder in the theatre's priorities.

John Gabriel Borkman is stuffed with stars just like a Binkie Beaumont production. Directors and designers were highly regarded then, of course – Cecil Beaton more than most, though modern designers would shudder at his sets.

But at least Binkie did put on new plays; it wasn't all revivals. At the director-led National, the play's not the thing, it's the interpretation. Directors are like art dealers; they prefer an old, established artist to a new one. Critics feel the same. You don't

know where you are with the new; you have to show your hand, you may make a fool of yourself. And with a new play, it's the play, not the director, which attracts attention. But a new *Hamlet*, a new *Cherry Orchard*, a new *Heade Gabler*, above all a new *Death of a Salesman* – there a director can show his wares.

Or he may like to have a go at one of those ridiculous old melodramas by Hugo or Schiller – shown in some stars and see if he can't break a little magic. (No, he can't, actually.) Thus we have revival after

revival after revival, but scarcely ever a new play.

When the National started, the Cottesloe, we were told, was to be for new work – and for a time it was. Now, the National relegates new plays to its studio, where they are "workshopped" for weeks with a director and actors, then disappear. This is as though critics were allowed into an artist's studio to repaint the canvases, then decide whether they're worth a show.

Just occasionally a new play is allowed on to the public stage, but usually only if it's by one of two or three very well-known favourite National writers. Sorry, but things were in fact better before the National was born.

It's proved not only a conservative but also a highly destructive institution, sucking the audience away from the West End, to which it will probably never go back. For one thing the National (except for the Cottesloe) is somewhere you can sit in comfort. The seats in most West End theatres, designed for smaller human beings, are now no longer acceptable to people with normal knees. You can park at the National, whereas getting to the West End is such an effort that people are discouraged before they start. And anyway, where are the stars?

They're at the National, doing revivals. It's only two or three nights a week, not the greatest money, but plenty of time to earn a serious living with voice-overs. The old idea of eight performances a week is anathema to those coddled darlings. And as for going on tour – please! Like all institutions, the National has become a cosy home for its inhabitants.

That's why the arrival of *Art* in a commercial West End is surprisingly cheering. People defend directors' theatre as more intelligent than actors', but I don't see much difference. (A genuine writers' theatre is a mirage.) But here an actor – Sean Connery, whose wife saw the play in Paris and got him to buy it – has put it on for three other actors. Warchus, one of our best young directors, has agreed to stage it, even though it isn't a revival. It's as though a group of artists hired their own dealer to put on a show, and sold every picture. That it's not a great play doesn't matter. It's a play – about the only new one in the West End.

The author is a playwright.



'Guys 'n' Dolls', the National's latest musical offering, is yet another revival and out of keeping with the theatre's original brief to stage new work

We didn't vote for a country called Europe

In Thursday's paper, Kenneth Clarke backed continental co-operation. John Redwood replies

The Chancellor was wrong to say, in his Chatham House lecture last Wednesday, that people thought we were joining a political union in Europe in the 1970s. In 1972, Britain joined the Common Market. No one then told us we were joining the European Union, or that the common market we sought would gradually metamorphose into a country called Europe run from a city called Brussels.

In the White Paper setting out our entry terms, in the parliamentary debates that led up to our accession, and in subsequent ministerial statements of Conservative and Labour governments, we were assured that it was a trading arrangement which would help our economic progress.

In 1975 this was all repeated to secure the consent of the British people in a referendum. Ask those now who voted 1975, and most will tell you they voted for a common market, nothing more and nothing less. They believed their leaders when they said that the supremacy of Parliament and the common law would remain, save in a few areas relating to a common agricultural and commercial policy.

In the 1980s, Parliament was

Europe's where the action is

Europe-file: the Chancellor speaks out

will still rest upon the American alliance, and where free trade may well have advanced through Gatt and the World Trade Organisation more rapidly than through the EC. There is no need to join someone else's currency because you trade with them. The EC accounts for less than half our total services and goods trade, but it is important.

Britain should stay at the table and lead the debates with our partners. Europe has need of the British view. We are uniquely placed to help modernise Europe: to save Europe from its worst impulses to too

much government, to warn her of the damage that higher taxes can do, to remind her that the Asian world is much bigger than the European and growing much faster.

It is British policies in telecoms and energy which have shown the way to the rest: deregulation and competition have powered growth and new technology. It is British policies towards the exchange rate, interest rates and labour markets that have delivered much better levels of employment in the past three years than they enjoy on the Continent.

We should be proud of our position relative to the jobs success, humble about our position relative to the jobs success, and work for a better future for the peoples of Western Europe and their governments.

Britain's economic interests lie in global trade and modern industries. We should warn that a single currency born of fudge will create havoc. Wrong interest rates and exchange rates will damage parts of the Union in a way which may prove impossible to correct.

We should offer a more positive alternative, based on removing regulation, opening markets, encouraging competition and reducing the size of government. Why is it that amidst all the budget misery, where national governments have to cut Brussels never proposes cutting its own less desirable expenditure? Do we really want those who designed and ran the common fishing policy running a common economic policy as well? It is time to offer something better: a Europe which works.

The writer is Conservative MP for Wokingham.

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Philip Thorpe: Imro chief behind reimbursement plan

Morgan Grenfell agrees to compensate 90,000

Up to 90,000 people will be compensated "at least up to the level of their original investment" following the Deutsche Morgan Grenfell bank scandal, it was announced yesterday.

No one will lose money as a result of recent events, promised the company's asset management division.

Morgan Grenfell Asset Management yesterday announced details of the compensation package it has drawn up following the autumn scandal, when irregularities were dis-

covered in three unit trust investments funds.

Analysts expect a total of around £200m in compensation to be paid out. It will not be known precisely how much each investors will get until calculations have finished. Payments will be made by the end of April, said the company.

The City watchdog Imro, run by Philip Thorpe, has been investigating irregularities in the funds since August.

Dealing in the three funds, with £1.4bn assets under man-

agement, was temporarily suspended in early September.

Fund manager Peter Young was later dismissed for gross misconduct, and four directors of the asset management division were dismissed as a result of "management failings" October.

Anyone who was investing in the funds between 1 August and 5 September, 1996 will be considered for compensation even if they no longer hold those investments, the company said.

People would be compensated for any difference between the actual return they received from their investment and the return provided over the 13-month period by an agreed set of comparable funds, it added.

The process of calculating compensation will begin immediately and the money is due to go out by the end of April. How much each person will receive will depend on several factors, including the value of their investment and their buying and selling movements.

"We will not know precisely how much each investor will receive until we have completed the task of calculating individual payments. This is scheduled for the end of April 1997," said the company.

Letters giving details of the arrangements were due to go out last night, and MGAM will write to people again at the end of January with more information, including a record of their transactions.

Robert Smith, its chief executive, said the compensation package provided "a fair and timely solution to a complex issue".

He added: "All investors will be compensated at least up to the level of their original investment, which safeguards the interests of investors," he added.

Northern bid outcome hangs in the balance

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

The outcome of the £782m hostile takeover bid for Northern Electric by US power generator CalEnergy was said to be "too close to call" as both sides argued late into the evening about the level of acceptances by shareholders, in what has possibly become the most acrimonious takeover battle since Granada versus Forte earlier this year.

In another surprise announcement the Takeover Panel, which polices bids, gave CalEnergy special dispensation not to release the result until at least midnight yesterday. The offer, which had been brought forward by the US predator from 4 January to 20 December, formally closed at 1pm yesterday afternoon and the result was expected at around 5pm.

Sources suggested that after several recounts CalEnergy, which owns almost 30 per cent of Northern shares, spoke for just over 49 per cent of its target, short of the 50 per cent and one share needed to win. Northern shares rose 3.5p to 641p. As tension mounted last night David Sokol, chairman of CalEnergy, was refusing to say why the Takeover Panel had intervened yet again in the battle. However, further allegations of spoiling tactics by Northern's stockbrokers, BZW, were believed to have been made. Mr

Sokol is thought to have been furious that several US funds were unable to lodge their acceptances in favour of CalEnergy by the deadline.

An anxious CalEnergy spokesman said: "It's very, very close and it's just too sensitive to say anything at the moment.

We'll be making an announcement as soon as we can." He did not rule out the possibility that the announcement of the final outcome could slip well beyond midnight.

The Nebraska-based group, which is offering Northern investors 650p a share, had previously gained acceptances from 4 per cent of big City shareholders.

However Standard Life, the insurance group which holds a 3 per cent stake in Northern, was thought to have accepted the offer, giving the US side a big boost.

CalEnergy had always insisted the result would be close, but Northern's fortunes were boosted in the last days of the bid as three of its biggest shareholders backed the existing management, led by battle-hardened David Morris, the chairman.

The Newcastle-based regional power supplier was supported by Prudential, its biggest investor which traditionally backs the management of utility companies exposed to hostile bids. The Prudential had an 11.35 per cent stake in Northern and argued the 650p-a-share all-cash offer was too cheap. Foreign & Colonial and M&G also backed the company, giving the company just over 15 per cent.

Northern has already stirred up controversy this week when BZW and its advisers, Schroders, bought 2.3 per cent of the company. CalEnergy made furious complaints to the Takeover Panel claiming the two companies were effectively indemnified against any losses on the shares because of the fees they are likely to earn from the bid campaign, but the Panel rejected the argument.

In addition, Northern's vociferous army of some 100,000 small investors, who together own around 17 per cent of the company, are also likely to stay loyal or not to respond to the offer at all. Some other investment funds were also staying on the sidelines last night. One fund manager, who did not want to be named, said: "We have a policy of only accepting an offer if it's agreed." If CalEnergy fails it will be the second time Mr Morris has fought off a hostile attack. His earlier success was the "scorched earth" defence of the £1.2bn bid Trafalgar House bid in 1994. By February 1995 Mr Morris had stunned investors with a £50m package of financial incentives worth a total of more than 500p a share, should they reject the offer.

Battle hardened: If CalEnergy fails it will be the second time David Morris (above) has fought off a hostile attack. His earlier success was the defence of the £1.2bn Trafalgar House bid in 1994.

BT loses case against Oftel

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

British Telecom was defeated yesterday in its High Court challenge to controversial fair trading powers planned by Don Cruickshank, the industry regulator.

The ruling, which was warmly welcomed by rival telephone operators, means from the new year that Oftel, Mr Cruickshank's watchdog body, will be able to intervene to ban any action by BT which it believes could thwart competition. BT had claimed Mr Cruickshank was acting unlawfully by elevating himself judge and jury over the company's affairs with no right of appeal.

The ruling, which has widespread implications for UK competition law, will now be extended by Oftel to other telecommunications operators and will also be applied in BSkyB as it rolls out its digital satellite television service.

Simon Holmes, a leading

competition lawyer with City firm SJ Berwin explained: "It is another step towards a more competition-oriented regime and another step away from a system which is purely focused on specific regulation. It's a trend which we are anticipating for other regulated industries as competition takes hold."

Poiting to the transformation in the telecommunications industry since Oftel was created at the time of BT's privatisation in 1984, Lord Justice Phillips and Mr Justice Hooper agreed the system of regulation should also be allowed to evolve. However, they admitted that the new licence condition, which mirrors European law, was a "novelty".

Ironically, BT also lost on what the judges said was its strongest argument, that Oftel had unlawfully removed the right of appeal to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, because the company had already consented to the new powers. The court challenge was to test their legal validity.

The ruling, which has widespread implications for UK competition law, will now be extended by Oftel to other telecommunications operators and will also be applied in BSkyB as it rolls out its digital satellite television service.

Simon Holmes, a leading

Chancellor claims credit for economic cheer

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

Kenneth Clarke claimed the credit for Christmas good cheer on the economy, with new figures yesterday showing the fastest growth in living standards since 1989 and a healthy balance of payments.

The British economy will enter the new year in the best shape for a generation. I will stick to policies that will enable us to keep it up," the Chancellor said.

The Prime Minister, John Major, made plain the Gov-

ernment's hopes that the economy will give it an electoral boost. "Britain's success is too valuable, too important to all of us to be put at risk," he said in a speech last night.

The stock market celebrated the latest good news, following a record drop in unemployment and a growing report from the OECD earlier this week, setting a record yesterday.

The FTSE 100 index climbed 26 points to a closing record 4,077.6, after bobbing above 4,100 in afternoon trading.

It was partly boosted by gains on Wall Street. The Dow Jones

index was 24 points higher at 6,497.86 by late morning. This followed a 127-point rise on Thursday, the biggest one-day jump in US share prices since 1987.

However, UK consumer confidence has fallen this month from November's record level, despite the recent run of good news on the economic front. People have become gloomier about both the general economic situation and their personal finances according to a survey carried out for the European Commission. It also showed that expectations of

future inflation have increased. The increase in GDP in the third quarter was smaller than previously estimated, official statisticians said yesterday, but this was due to upward revisions to the level of output in the second quarter. GDP grew 0.7 per cent during the third quarter, or 2.4 per cent year-on-year. Growth in the second quarter was revised up to 0.6 per cent or 2.3 per cent year-on-year.

Investment spending fell during the quarter, dominated by a 7.3 per cent drop in capital expenditure by the privatised electricity, gas and water companies

to the lowest level so far this decade.

Consumer spending made the main contribution to growth, driven by big increases in disposable incomes adjusted for inflation. Thanks to earnings growth and tax cuts, the annual rate of increase in real incomes rose to 4.6 per cent during the July-September quarter, the fastest since early 1989.

Separate figures showed that the balance of payments worsened slightly during the third quarter, showing a tiny deficit of £71m compared with a small surplus of £544m in the previous

quarter. The dip was due to reduced income from investment.

The balance on "invisible" earnings—services, investment income and transfers—nearly offset the trade deficit, and is likely to set a record.

The invisibles surplus of £8.9bn for the first nine months of 1996 has already beaten last year's record.

Profits sent abroad by companies which have invested in the UK reached a record £3.6bn in the third quarter, but remained only half the record £7.1bn earned on UK investment overseas.

WBA's goal is £7.5m AIM flotation

Patrick Tooher

West Bromwich Albion yesterday became the latest football club to sign up for a stock market flotation by announcing plans to join the junior Alternative Investment Market in the new year with a £7.5m price tag.

The news came as Sunderland

revealed its Premier League revealed its public offer had been oversubscribed 2.7 times, providing further evidence of investors' appetite for shares in football clubs. Dealings in Sunderland shares are due to begin on Christmas Eve.

West Brom's flotation involves the admission of 73,265 ordinary shares of £10 each. In

the 13 months to June, West Brom made a pre-tax profit of £171,000 on a turnover of £489,000 in the year to May 1995.

The club, nicknamed the Baggies, will have the added satisfaction of beating arch-rivals Birmingham City to a stock market quotation as

dealings in its shares are due to begin on 3 January.

Earlier this week, first division rivals Sheffield United became a public company via a reverse takeover of Conradi, a quoted leisure group, while Newcastle United of the Premier League confirmed plans to seek a full listing in the spring.

Profit warning by Swiss bank

CS Holding yesterday added its name to the lengthening list of Swiss banks that are making profit warnings. The bank, which also owns CS First Boston, expects to make a loss of around SF1.2bn (£943m) for the year.

The bank is making SF5.1bn of provisions to cover bad loans, as the domestic economy continues to suffer from six years of recession. Standard & Poor's yesterday acted on the news, lowering the bank's long term credit rating from "AA+" to "A".

"It's a massive charge, but it was to be expected, given what's happened at the other Swiss banks," said Thomas Kalbermatter, an analyst at UBS. Last month Union Bank of Switzerland said it would make a record SF1.5bn loss after announcing SF1.5bn of provisions.

CS also plans to invest in its subsidiary set up to hold high-risk credit provisions.

In total, SF450m will be set aside for extraordinary depreciation.

three German energy companies, and Nordostschweizerische Kraftwerke, a Swiss utility. The disposal will result in a profit of around SF1.1bn.

CS said it had taken a new approach to making provisions for bad debts. Instead of using a calculation based on defaults which have actually taken place, it uses an estimation of expected losses.

The charge for provisions comprises several elements. CS is setting aside SF630m for credit risk while it makes the transition to the new methodology. It is also setting aside a fluctuation reserve of SF2.0bn. Approximately SF450m of this will come from the bank's reserve for general bank risks and SF1.55bn will be charged to the profit and loss account.

A further extraordinary provision of SF600m will be taken to cover Vertiga, its energy company, to a consortium made up of Bayernwerk, Badenwerk and Energieversorgung Schwanen,

STOCK MARKETS						
FTSE 100						Dow Jones*
1957.67						3,640
+52.35						+1.8%
1947.34	+33.10	+0.8	4,073.10	3,532.30	3.93	
1946.80	+26.30	+0.6	4,015.30	3,515.30	3.59	
2009.40	+15.40	+0.8	2022.10	1816.80	3.65	
2146.79	+6.23	+0.3	2244.36	1954.06	3.21	
1979.85	+14.54	+0.7	1994.54	1791.95	3.61	
1947.64	+128.87	+2.0	5547.79	5032.94	2.09	
1957.67	-52.35	-3.6	2266.80	1957.67	0.80	
1946.56	+80.54	+0.6	13530.95	10204.87	3.23	
1907.75	-13.00	-0.5	2003.91	2253.36	1.62	
Statistics as of 20 December						

INTEREST RATES						
Short sterling*						



JEREMY WARNER

'Schroders and BZW brought a chunk of Northern Electric with the intention of voting the shares against the bid... from what I hear it irritated some shareholders so much it finally made them vote in favour'

Northern bid brings back whiff of the Eighties

Maybe it's that stage of the cycle again. But Northern Electric's City advisers, Schroders and BZW, brought back a hint of the 1980s this week in the tactics deployed defending their client against an unwanted bid from CE Electric of the US. The outcome of the bid was still in doubt at the time of going to press last night with various allegations of skulduggery being aired before the Takeover Panel. It almost brings a warm glow to the heart, for it hasn't been like this for years.

With the bidders still short by a whisker of the necessary 50 per cent, the primary allegation was that of "boxing in". That means accelerated settlement of share transactions for those sympathetic to the defence cause, and slow settlement for those hostile to it - generally arbitrageurs. Acceptance by some US ads was turned away as too late, it was alleged. Naturally, both allegations are denied.

But what really caught my eye was something that occurred earlier in the week. What Schroders and BZW did was to buy a chunk of Northern Electric with the intention of voting the shares against the bid. Since the exercise was likely to cost the advisers quite a sum of money in the event of their achieving their purpose (frustration of the bid), they had some explaining to do. The Takeover Panel considered the move well into the night and eventually ruled that

the advisers were within their rights. It is impossible to tell whether it did the cause any good, but from what I hear it was probably counter-productive, irritating some Northern Electric shareholders so much that it finally tipped the balance and made them vote in favour of the bid. The techniques of the 1980s may be back, but it seems to be that much more difficult to make them work in favour of the client.

Let me explain why. In the bad old days of the City - pre-Guinness - it was par for the course to try to manipulate the market in favour of bidder or defender. Not everyone did it but those who expected to succeed generally dabbled in the black arts to some degree.

So called "fan clubs" would be organised, buying or selling shares in a co-ordinated fashion designed to benefit those they supported. Since in many instances these share purchases would result in a loss, there had to be a quid pro quo. Typically, supporters would be those with a commercial interest in the outcome - suppliers, advisers, contractors. The pay-off would be a strengthening of the relationship (ie more contracts), a dollop of pension fund money to manage, or perhaps a slug of non-existent consultancy work.

These essentially corrupt practices reached their logical end game in the Guinness affair, which both in terms of size and sophistication surpassed anything that had

gone before. The niceties of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" were dispensed with in favour of no-nonsense indemnities against loss and straight cash payments for services rendered.

The point about market manipulation, however, is that it doesn't work unless it is conducted in secret. If everyone knows what is going on, if it is disclosed and transparent, then it is also highly likely to be counter-productive.

That is what probably happened in the Northern Electric case. The defenders won control of another 2.3 per cent, but this could easily have been counter-balanced by the number of shareholders they irritated in the process. Neither Schroders nor BZW made any attempt to hide what they were doing, nor given the rules, would they have thought of doing so. All that died with Guinness. About the best they could do in the circumstances was to say they were buying for genuine long-term investment purposes.

In fact they never tried to claim even this, publicly at least, for it is not an easy case to sustain. Everyone was left to draw their own conclusions. Since the advisers so obviously had a commercial interest in the bid failing, the effect was to alienate other shareholders from their cause. Schroders and BZW can afford to take the loss on these share purchases because they will be compensated in other ways. For a start, they've got a success

feeling on Northern coming out of it with its independence intact. And, of course, their "relationship" with the client will be strengthened. That means more lucrative fees to come. Other shareholders were not in this happy position.

Something similar happened during Enterprise Oil's bid for Lasmo two years ago, although this was not a case of market manipulation as such. In the closing stages of the bid, Enterprise's advisers tried to boost their position by offering preferential terms to a select group of large shareholders. It so infuriated other Lasmo investors that they turned on Enterprise and the bid was lost.

The lesson, then, is that nobody gets any credit for playing silly games. Shareholders want bid battles to be fought on their merits, not on clever little manoeuvres by those with a commercial interest in the outcome.

right of silence. It is plainly wrong that a murderer or rapist gets better protection under the law than a financial swindler. The trouble is that everyone knows that there was widespread crookery during the Guinness bid for Distillers and that Ernest was one of the ring-leaders.

To be able to say you were unfairly tried is one thing. But it doesn't clear your name. Most people continue to be appalled at the prospect of Mr Saunders' conviction being quashed. As for compensation, there would be rioting at the doors of Westminster if it were ever paid.

Mr Saunders is right to claim he was treated in an oppressive manner but I suspect that an opinion poll on the matter would confirm that most people think he thoroughly deserved it.

Which brings us back to the question of whether it is possible for the authorities to get convictions in cases like this if defendants cannot be required to give evidence against themselves. Lord Roskill, the judge whose recommendations led to the formation of the Serious Fraud Office, believed this to be the only way of dealing with the complex and sometimes impenetrable nature of financial crime. He's probably right. So do we just give up and make these things a purely civil matter? I think not, for that would only encourage the view that there is one law for the rich and an altogether different one for the poor.

Stock Exchange chief in early exit

Peter Rodgers
Financial Editor

The Stock Exchange yesterday lost one of its most senior executives with the resignation of Giles Varday, a £240,000-a-year director who lost out in the competition earlier this year to take over the top job at the Exchange.

Mr Varday said he planned to return to the securities industry from where the Exchange recruited him in 1992. He is to leave next March.

In the spring he was widely tipped as the likely internal candidate for the chief executive's job after Michael Lawrence was forced out because of disagreements with the board over the new computerised order book trading system.

But the Exchange board decided not to consider internal candidates, and Gavin Casey was brought in from Merrill Lynch as chief executive in August.

In the stock market, there was no suggestion of anything other than an amicable parting with Mr Casey, in stark contrast to the blazing rows that led to

the departure of Mr Lawrence.

But Mr Varday is nevertheless likely to be entitled to a pay-off. According to the annual report all the Exchange's executive directors are on one-year rolling contracts, and he is to leave just over three months after resigning.

The Exchange said: "There are no payments being made to Mr Varday other than those to which he is contractually entitled under his contract of employment."

Observers believe Mr Varday is leaving because he helped reorganise himself out of a senior job at the Exchange, which is slimming down and concentrating on its core activities.

This has left less scope for a board which - with Mr Varday - comprises four full-time executive directors and a chief executive.

The Exchange confirmed that Mr Varday is not being replaced, and it is expected that his departure will lead to further reorganisation.

He is the Exchange's highest paid executive after Mr

Lawrence, earning a salary of £170,000 last year, a performance bonus of £56,000 and benefits of more than £13,000.

Mr Varday said he had always intended to leave the Stock Exchange after four or five years. He was returning to the securities industry because "that is where I came from, that is the business I know".

Mr Varday was best known recently for pushing through the new computerised order-driven trading system, which is to be inaugurated next October.

However, the main technical and regulatory elements of the system have now been agreed and by the time Mr Varday leaves in March it is expected to be in the trial stage.

He was also involved in the Exchange's move from a fortnightly account to rolling settlement and the introduction of the AIM market for small firms.

Mr Varday's marketing of the Exchange abroad led to a memorandum of understanding with China, and the first Chinese firm was listed on the Exchange this week.

Giles Varday: Involved at the Stock Exchange in the introduction of the AIM market for small firms

IN BRIEF

Tarmac has been told to repay £19.9m to the Government. In December 1992 Tarmac acquired PSA Projects from the Department of the Environment, but both sides were unable to agree certain elements of the deal and the disputed items were referred to an independent expert in October 1995. Tarmac's legal advisers are reviewing the expert's decision.

French industrial production fell sharply in October for the second month in a row, providing further evidence that the economy was set to end the year on a weak note, official figures showed. Industrial production, excluding energy, dropped 0.8 per cent in October from September. Manufacturing output, which excludes energy, agri-food, businesses and construction, fell 1.2 per cent month-on-month.

The electricity industry regulator, will reduce the fossil fuel Levy from 3.7 to 2.2 per cent from 1 April. The new rate should be sufficient to cover renewable energy commitments and the payments due to the non-privatised part of the nuclear industry, it said. Following the flotation of British Energy, the levy in respect of nuclear commitments will cease from 1 April 1998.

Premier Farnell has conditionally agreed to sell Farnell Electronic Services, its volume electronic components distribution business, to Arrow Electronics of the US for \$300m (£180m) cash.

Ofgas, the industry regulator, warned that there may be greater interruptions for the larger of British Gas's TransCo customers this winter.

Ofgas said in a statement that British Gas TransCo had suggested that with the construction of new power stations, which burn large amounts of gas, and some delays in planned production, the demand for gas might outstrip supply, leading to increased interruptions for larger customers.

Amec firmly in Europe with £40m Spie buy

Michael Harrison

Amec, the British construction group, yesterday took a big step into Europe by buying control of its French rival, Spie Batignolles, in partnership with a £40m management and employee buyout.

The combined group will be the second-largest contractor in Europe with turnover of £4.7bn and 48,000 employees.

Initially, Amec is paying £20m-£22m for a stake of between 40 and 48.6 per cent in Spie with the remainder of the shares acquired by management and employees. But it has an option in six years to take full control by buying out the other shareholders.

Amec and the Spie employees will pay the owners of the business, Schneider, £40m in cash. Spie has also agreed to buy out Schneider's 50 per cent stake in the electrical ser-

vices business Spie Trindel for £75m.

The deal follows Kværner of Norway's unsuccessful bid for Amec and Amec's failure to merge with fellow UK contractor, MacAlpine.

Peter Mason, chief executive of Amec, said: "Europe is the largest construction market in the world and it is beginning to consolidate. In the long term there will only be half-a-dozen contractors left in Europe. If we don't do something to prevent it, we will be left behind and there won't be a UK player in that premier league."

Amec employs 20,000 and with turnover of £2.7bn is a big player in the oil and gas and rail markets and building and civil engineering.

Spie, one of the 10-strong consortium that built the Channel Tunnel, is France's fifth-biggest contractor specialising in electrical and civil engi-

neering construction and pipe laying. It has 28,000 employees and sales of £2bn a year.

In recent years, Spie's trading performance has been affected by a number of problem contracts and its exposure to property development. Last year it made pre-tax profits of £4m and this year Amec said it would be profitable at the trading level.

But the property division, together with liabilities relating to a number of construction contracts and Spie's North American interests are being retained by Schneider. Spie will not be net cash of Fr1.2bn (£137m).

Amec said the acquisition would give it greater access to European and international markets, particularly France where construction output is forecast to grow by 0.4 per cent in 1997 after several years of decline.

National Express to comply with MMC

National Express yesterday agreed to give undertakings on price and service levels on five coach routes between London and the North after the Monopolies and Mergers Commission ruled that its takeover of the competing rail service, Midland Main Line, was against the public interest.

The group will be required to restrict increases in coach fares to the retail price index and maintain the current levels of service, unless there is "a significant reduction in passenger numbers".

Erie Patterson, chief executive of National Express, welcomed Mr Lang's announcement, adding: "The behavioural undertakings sought are broadly in line with those we had previously offered."

The MMC concluded that National Express's takeover of the Midland Main Line from British Rail would reduce competition in the leisure market on the five routes and lead to higher fares for both rail and coach passengers and a lower standard of service.

Around 90 per cent of coach passengers and 40 per cent of rail passengers on the routes are leisure travellers.

Fortis to pay out £850m for bank

Peter Rodgers
Financial Editor

MeesPierson, the world's oldest merchant bank, was bought yesterday for 2.5bn guilders (£850m) by Fortis, the Belgian and Dutch-owned insurance and banking group.

Founded in 1720 in Rotterdam as Mees and Zonen, MeesPierson is being sold by the giant Dutch bank ABN Amro, which owns Hoare Govett, the London securities house.

Hoare Govett is not affected by the deal, which represents one of the largest acquisitions in the history of the Netherlands. The release of capital tied up in the MeesPierson business frees ABN Amro to concentrate on expansion elsewhere.

Earlier this year it offered more than £1bn for Standard Federal Bancorporation, one of the largest savings banks in the US Mid-west.

This was the culmination of a series of acquisitions across the Atlantic, including three others this year, which have confirmed its position as the biggest foreign bank operating in the US.

MeesPierson has less than a tenth of its business in the UK, but is a big operator in the Dutch corporate finance, fund management and private banking markets.

The acquisition will make Fortis one of the three biggest financial services groups in the Benelux countries and the fourth-largest Dutch bank. Total assets under management will be £80bn.

Fortis said the acquisition would make a positive contribution to Fortis' earnings per share from 1997. The group will partially finance the acquisition by a rights issue early next year and the rest will be from bond issues and internal resources.

The two parent companies of the group, Fortis AG of Belgium and Fortis Amex in the Netherlands, will contribute equal amounts in cash.

Dennis Ederzel, a banking analyst at Delta Lloyd Bank, said: "If you look at recent prices for takeovers, that's not an exaggerated amount." The price includes this year's profits and the goodwill payment is about 500m guilders.

Interest Rates

Morgan Grenfell European Growth Trust.

Morgan Grenfell Europa Fund.

Morgan Grenfell European Capital Growth Fund.

Important announcement for investors.

Morgan Grenfell Asset Management Limited and IMRO have agreed a package of compensation for investors in the above funds.

Who is eligible?

Investors will be considered for compensation if they held any of the three funds at any time between 1 August 1995 and 5 September 1996, whether or not they continue to invest in the fund(s).

What is the basis for compensation?

Investors will be compensated for any difference between the actual return they received from their Morgan Grenfell investment(s) and the return provided over the above period by an agreed index of comparable funds drawn from appropriate Micropal* data.

In addition, in the event that investments have lost value, even after this calculation, Morgan Grenfell will compensate investors up to the value of their original investment.

How will compensation be paid?

Those eligible for compensation will have the option of receiving either new units in the relevant fund(s) or cash.

When will compensation be paid?

The process of calculating compensation will begin immediately. Because of the large number of investors in the funds, payments are scheduled to be made at the end of April 1997.

Will interest be paid?

Yes. Investors will receive a payment in respect of interest on their compensation from 5 September 1996 or the date on which their holding in the fund(s) was sold, if earlier, until compensation is paid.

How are PEP holders affected?

The compensation package does not affect the tax-free status of PEPs.

How much will each investor receive?

This will depend on the timing of each investor's purchase(s) and sale(s) in the fund(s), but every investor will be compensated at least up to the level of their original investment. This means that no one will lose money as a result of recent events at Morgan Grenfell.

We will not know how much each investor will receive until we have completed the task of calculating individual payments. This is scheduled for the end of April 1997.

What should investors do now?

Investors need take no action as there is no requirement to register for compensation.
We are unable to give estimates of individual compensation payments.

We have written to all investors in the three affected funds on 20 December and will be writing to them again at the end of January 1997 with a history of their transactions in the fund(s) together with further information on the compensation package.



**MORGAN GRENFELL
ASSET MANAGEMENT**

sport

Amateurs promote expansive approach

David Llewellyn
on two small clubs'
big day in rugby
union's Pilkington
Cup fifth round

This morning a freelance helicopter pilot and a railway police officer will be among the shoal of hopeful amateurs and part-timers preparing for the biggest day of their rugby lives when they will try to topple the big fish in the Pilkington Cup fifth round.

There are just a few small fry left in the competition, swimming against the tide of professional clubs, a tide which generally overwhelms the best efforts of the lesser lights. But that is not to say that Wigton's Grant Lawrence, a former Royal Navy helicopter pilot, and the Reading hooker Scott Perkin, who works for the railway police, will not be trying their damnedest to arrest the progress of Moseley and Saracens respectively.

Both clubs boast an expansive style. Lawrence has scored 14 tries on the wing this season, while 24 Reading players have got on to the scoresheet to date. "At Wigton we play a good running game," Lawrence said. "We have a mobile set of forwards and the backs like running straight, hard and true."

It is no different for Reading. With such a large list of try-scorers theirs is also an expansive game and they promise today will be no different. Mike Tewkesbury, their director of coaching, said: "We believe in getting into the opposition half as quickly as possible, but with the ball in hand. Our policy is to involve all team members in the game and we won't change that."

Although they are at home, Reading's task against the big-spending First Division club, who boast Michael Lynch and Philippe Sella in their line-up, looks by far the more onerous. Third Division Reading have just two full-time professionals in their squad, compared with Saracens' dozen.

These two full-timers are fairly impressive though. The scrum-half Andre Bachet, who has scored four tries, including two in the previous round, and the centre Mark Scharenberg are US Eagles having each won almost 20 international caps. But while they



The Reading pack practice their scrummaging for today's home Pilkington Cup tie with Saracens, a big-spending club who are two divisions higher

are paid between £25,000 and £30,000 each, Saracens have acquired their big names for much bigger money. François Pienaar, the former South African captain who joins after Christmas, will reportedly pick up £500,000 in his two and a bit seasons with the north London club.

Wigton have no professionals and Ray Graham is the director of coaching of the lowest club in the competition, they are currently second in North One, the equivalent of a fifth division. Graham only took

up the coaching duties (unpaid of course) at the start of the season, but already their direct, running game has set them alight.

"It's Ray's coaching that has lifted Wigton," said Lawrence, who is trying to get his commercial flying career off the ground. "If you talk to supporters they will tell you it is a long time since they have seen rugby like this played at Wigton. I am really enjoying it. I know I'll get the ball in a match and I've been averaging almost a try a game."

Graham, 46, who has played in all eight forward positions, believes in giant-killing. He was captain of the Wigton side that felled Sale when Steve Smith and Fran Cotton were around.

Cotton was so angry after that

24-7 preliminary-round defeat

that he kicked the changing-room door (the club have since

bad the mark framed).

Graham's philosophy is sim-

ple. "If we kick we lose control," he said. "Anyway our fly-half Tane Manuera can't kick very well." The Maori, signed as an

amateur from rugby league side Carlisle Raiders, is certainly not afraid to run the ball from his own 22 according to his team-mates.

They are ambitious plans afoot for Wigton to amalgamate with the Raiders, but having also acquired a former player of theirs, the centre Matt Elliott, who has improved immeasurably since his return from the 15-man code, it looks as if they are well down the line to pool playing resources at least.

Graham is positive about the

tie. The two sides last met in the competition in the 1979-80 season, immediately after toppling Sale. On that occasion Wigton lost at home 7-3 - "to a try that wasn't," claims their secretary, Malcolm Stunter.

This time Graham points out: "We are better prepared. Moseley are still trying to build their team. We are also on a run having won our last 12 games. Ours is a side that believes in itself."

Down at Reading, Tewkesbury is more cautious. "The

days of Cup upsets are going," he said. "There is a vast gulf opening between the First and some of the Second Division clubs and the rest. The professionals can train day in, day out, improving and grooving techniques and ball skills. But we respect Saracens and we believe they are a side we can learn from."

So there you have it. Reading expect to learn from their experience.

Wigton are bent on teaching Moseley a lesson.

Photograph: Robert Hallam

Clubs are offered interim payments

The Rugby Football Union yesterday ignored the delay in the English Professional Rugby Union Clubs signing the agreement the two sides have reached and promised nearly £1m to the First and Second Division clubs to help the poorer among them to settle their wage bills.

The payments of £40,000 to each of the 24 clubs, the first installments of the £8m they should share this season, are being made by the RFU on the basis that the agreement that was negotiated on 5 December is signed soon. The Epruc clubs met yesterday, but Kim DeShayes, Epruc's chief executive, said: "Unfortunately because of illness, an important document was not available for us to consider. So, we will reconvene on 7 January in the expectation that we can conclude the deal."

The RFU said that the payments were being made because the complex legal and taxation issues involved were delaying finalising the agreement.

The Scottish Rugby Union has turned down an appeal by Tim Grady, of Edinburgh Wanderers, against an 18-month ban imposed on him last month. Grady was cited following his side's Tenthants National League match against Portobello FP on 12 October during which an opponent suffered facial injuries. The incident is the subject of current civil and criminal actions.

Cowen members rejected a takeover bid from Coventry City Football Club by a large majority at an extraordinary general meeting, where the preferred option was to explore the best possible deal with the London property group Leader.

Under the Leander proposal, the club would become a plc and the property group would take a controlling interest by buying a million £1 shares.

The referees' dispute which has disrupted this weekend's Welsh League programme could shortly be resolved. Following an emergency meeting of the Welsh Rugby Union general committee, WRU officials and referees' representatives will sit down together to try to settle the contentious issue of match fees which provoked this weekend's strike.

12.25 CANTERBURY V NEWCASTLE UNITED

Weak Wigan send for 'Doc'

Rugby League

DAVE HADFIELD

David "Doc" Murray has flown in from Auckland to provide an immediate cure for Wigan's relatively threadbare squad in the Boxing Day match against St Helens.

The 24-year-old Murray will go straight into his new side at full-back for the future. "We still have a very small squad by our standards and the arrival of a player of Doc's ability can only increase the competition for places," said the Wigan coach, Graeme West.

Murray — the medical qualification is merely the lingering symptom of a childhood nickname — impressed in two matches against the Great Britain tourists this autumn. "Salford had already made me an offer but when Wigan came in I had no hesitation," he said.

He will play on Boxing Day against a former team-mate at the Auckland Warriors, St Helens' new prop Julian O'Neill. Wigan's two other recent signings, the forwards, Stephen Holgate and Ian Sherratt, will

Jamie Mashou at Headingley.

13.00 MANCHESTER CITY V MURKIN

13.30 RUGBY UNION V RUGBY UNION

13.45 RUGBY LEAGUE V RUGBY LEAGUE

14.00 RUGBY UNION CHAMPIONSHIP V RUGBY UNION CHAMPIONSHIP

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Inchcailloch to shoot down Missile

Racing

GREG WOOD

As weather forecasters warned of a biting cold weekend yesterday, many a prayer will have been offered up from Portman Square for the well-being of next Thursday's Boxing Day cards. The nationwide freeze which blanketed out the entire holiday programme 12 months ago is still a painful memory for racing administrators as well as bookies, since it resulted in a drop in annual betting turnover figures and thus in the Levy.

Another similar loss would be a significant blow at what is already a difficult time and the British Horseracing Board stepped in yesterday to ensure that at least one meeting will take place by sanctioning an extra all-weather card at Lingfield to bring the number of Boxing Day meetings up to 11.

Nor does it help that today's excellent card at Ascot coincides with the final Saturday before

Christmas, when minds and wallets will be more concerned with those difficult last-minute presents. There is almost £150,000 in added money on offer at the Berkshire track on a programme which includes one Grade One event and two Grades Two, not to mention the Betterware Cup Handicap Chase, the most obvious betting event for good measure. Even in a season when time is unusually precious, it is worth taking a few minutes to sort out this last contest in particular.

The first problem to consider is just how much effect the drizzle which fell on Ascot for much of yesterday will have had on the going. Though it is still predicted as generally good-to-firm, water has an unfortunate effect on Ascot, and can rapidly turn the ground into sticky goo. The ground was fast at the five-day stage and trainers made their entries accordingly, so any softening of the surface might count against several of today's runners, Strong Medicina and Un-

guided Missile (for whom three miles is at the top-end of the stamina range) being the most obvious candidates.

The possibility that Unguided Missile might not quite get home is an intriguing one, since the major bookmakers makes him the morning-line favourite. He makes little appeal at around 3-1, but the same cannot be said of Inchcailloch, his principal market rival.

The winner not only of the

Cesarewitch Handicap at New-

market but also three chases in the last two months, Jeff King's chaser has apparently found a new burst of improvement at the age of seven. And, while the 7-2 offered by Coral this morning will not bring retirement significantly closer, it is still a very fair price, Major Bell, runner-up to the handicap blot Strong Promise at Ascot four weeks ago, may be a danger over today's extra half-mile, but INCHCAILLOCH (nap 2.20) will surely take all the beating.

BETTING TIPS: Ascot - 10 Year Tale

ASCOT

1.10: MAKE A STAND won one of the season's most competitive handicaps at Sandown last time and has the experience, as well as the ability, to win this. Latah was a useful stay-on the Flat for the trainer of Bowles Court, Reg Akhurst, but disappointed badly on his last two starts and may find this trip too sharp over jumps. Perfect Pal, sent not by a very capable trainer, looks a greater threat.

1.45: WHAT A QUESTION and

HYPERION'S TV TIPS

Tringalot are meeting for the third time this season and while the weights now favour Jimmy Fitz Gerald's charge, the selection finished so strongly at Newbury last time that she can prevail again.

2.20: GO BALLISTIC is 10th best off for the 3½ furlong distance which he has beaten by Inchcailloch over this track and trip last time, when a mistake two fences out ruined his chance. He had previously won impressively over this course and distance which suits him so well. Major Bell has performed well here last time when beaten by only the extremely well-handicapped Strong Promise, while Turnng Trix is another progressive performer who is the one contender that would not be troubled if the going became appreciably softer.

2.20: GO BALLISTIC

1.10: MAKE A STAND

1.45: WHAT A QUESTION

sport

The difference 1,000 games can make

In May 1966 a 16-year-old goalkeeper made his debut for Leicester City. Tomorrow

Peter Shilton becomes the first footballer to make 1,000 League appearances.

Glenn Moore talks to those who have played with and against him, and assesses how football has changed during one man's remarkable career

There was something odd about seeing Peter Shilton keeping goal for Leyton Orient at Craven Cottage on Saturday. It was not just the setting, Fulham's ground is grand by Third Division standards and, many years ago, Shilton played there in the old First Division.

It was not his game. He made one stunning save, several good ones and was only beaten by a very fine goal. He concentrated, he pointed and, each time a Fulham forward got through, he would bellow at his defenders. Still barking after all these years.

It was his size. He looked smaller than remembered, whether hunched in his goal or patrolling the penalty area. Maybe, at 47, there is some natural shrinkage but it is more a case that, even in the simplest things, the game has changed beyond recognition since Shilton came into it.

It was May 1966, two months before England won the World Cup, when Shilton made his League debut. Manfred Mann were top of the charts, the transfer record stood at £115,000 (for Denis Law), Northampton were in the old First Division. Wimbledon were playing Folkestone in the Southern League.

Shilton, then a 16-year-old schoolboy international, played for Leicester City against Everton. He stood in for Gordon Banks, who was on England duty, and kept a clean sheet. Two years later he had replaced Banks in the Leicester team permanently.

It seems strange now, with Steve Ogrizovic, Ludek Miklosko and Peter Schmeichel bestriding the Premiership, but, at just over six foot with a heavily developed upper body, some regarded Shilton as big for a top goalkeeper.

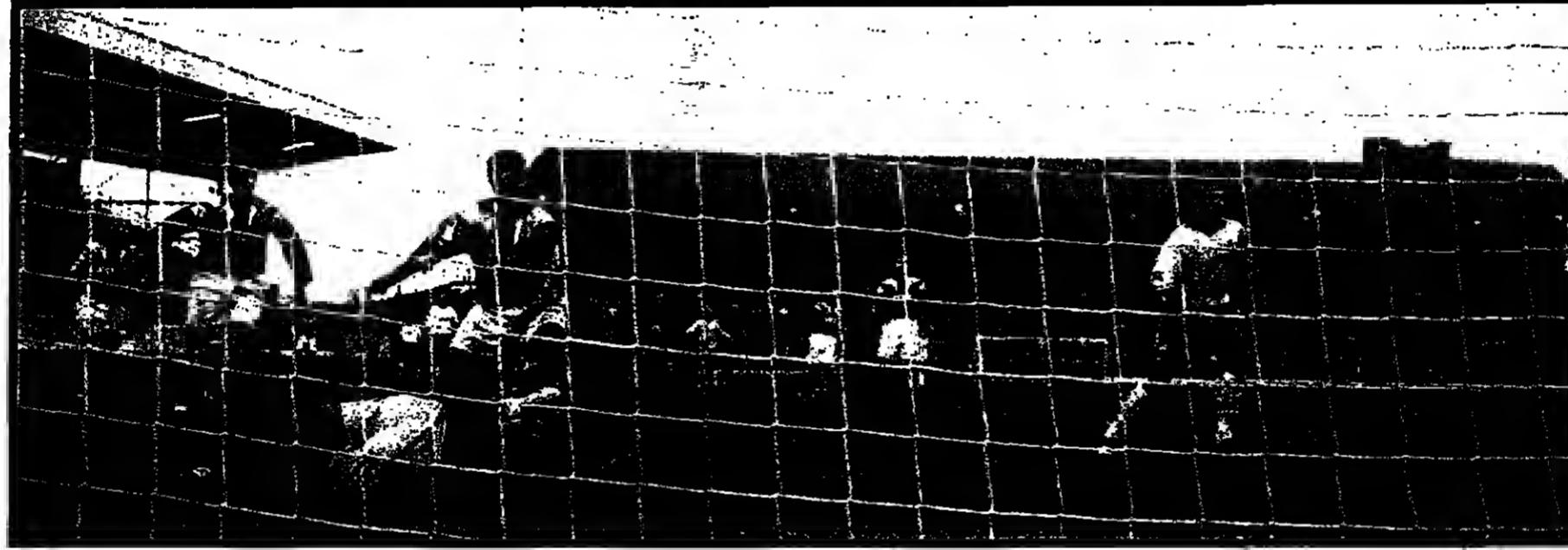
Goalkeeping was a different art then. The balls, though no longer the sodden leathers of yore, moved differently. Poor floodlighting made some night matches difficult and pitches were often rutted or glutinous. The shoulder charges which put goalkeeper and ball into the net together had disappeared but a new practice of packing the box with bodies, preventing the goalkeeper reaching the ball, was replacing it.

Goalkeepers were changing from shot-stoppers to being part of the team. Liverpool's Tommy Lawrence



Two legends and one ball: Peter Shilton (left) and Gordon Banks, both of Stoke City and England, in a 1974 training session (above). Twenty-two years later Shilton makes his 999th Football League appearance, for Leyton Orient at Fulham last Saturday (below).

Photographs: Alf Markey/Daily Mirror (above) and Peter Jay (below)



was one of the first to act as auxiliary sweeper. Shilton was quick to adapt. His dedication to his craft was total.

"He was a self-made goalkeeper, not a natural like Pat Jennings," Bob Wilson said. "He called his book 'The Magnificent Obsession' and he has been obsessed with goalkeeping and being the best since day one." Shilton was strong but agile, with a draughtsman's command of angles and an enormous presence. "He was Schmeichel before Schmeichel," Wilson added. "He would always do things to look different, to look big, like wearing the white jersey."

"He could be physically intimidating to forwards and he bolted everybody. Like Schmeichel he did not admit to a bad goal."

Football was so different then.

Shoot! magazine, the granddaddy of the genre, did not exist. *Match of the Day* was in its infancy and radio commentaries were rare.

Players were often paid in cash, weekly, and lived in modest homes. Money was beginning to flood into the game, encouraged by the twin attractions of George Best and the World Cup win, but it took time for football's new glamour to spread from London and Manchester to the smaller cities.

By the time it did, Shilton was an England international and he was catching on. Jon Holmes, one of the

first and most enduring of agents, is Leicester-based and he negotiated Shilton's 1974 move to Stoke City. "That had not been done too much at the time," Holmes has recalled. "Stoke were a bit surprised and I think they thought our approach was more commercial than anything they had encountered before."

Three years later he joined Nottingham Forest – despite Stoke City's chairman telling Brian Clough: "You do realise he'll put you in the workhouse. He's earning a fortune and he'll want at least a 10 per cent pay rise."

Rumour has it that Shilton actually took a cut in pay, though it was to be quickly topped up with bonuses.

The move was long overdue. Shilton was almost 28, he had won 23 England caps – and a Second Division championship medal. He had been relegated twice and only finished in the top eight once in a decade of regular first-team football.

In medal terms he was under-achieving. His best season had been with Stoke in 1975. Top in February, they finished fifth. Alan Hudson, the team's fulcrum, has since blamed Shilton's "posturing" for their decline.

It is hard to imagine an England No 1 now joining a club like Stoke were then. A modern equivalent might be Leicester – but then think of Ravanelli and Jannini at Middlesbrough. Money talks.

The title was clinched by arguably Shilton's greatest save, from Mike

Ferguson of Coventry. The second European crown saw possibly his best match as Kevin Keegan and Hamburg were defied.

Then, while still England goalkeeper, he made another apparently curious move, to Southampton. There was one bravura season, when Southampton finished second and reached the FA Cup semi-final, but the honours dried up.

He moved on to Derby, where he was still reputed to be earning £250,000 in his 40th year. Derby were relegated and Shilton went to Plymouth as player-manager. One relegation was already in train and, after failing in the play-offs two seasons later, he was sacked as Argyle slid towards further demotion.

By now the money problems were in the open. John McGovern, a former Forest team-mate, had walked out over an unpaid personal loan, the Argyle chairman, Dan McCauley, alleged he owed £50,000 in back taxes, Martin Pipe, the racehorse trainer, sued over unpaid bills, and one of his houses was repossessed.

There have also been marital problems and problems with the bottle – one distinguished former international recalled the aftermath of England's 1984 match in

West Germany, in which he was suspended for a month, fined £10,000, and given a three-game ban. Southampton, however, had been promoted.

Shilton had since tramped the clubs, coaching here, acting as goalkeeping cover there. He did play twice, for Bolton, but, by a statistical quirk, only one game counts in the record books.

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After that match he said he was still adapting to the lower divisions. "At a higher level you can read things, here you have to react to situations more." The back-pass rule also appeared a problem. Shilton added this week: "It is completely different now. The pace of the game has changed. It is a lot quicker from end to end. You can be attacking, two passes later the opposition are having a shot."

Tomorrow's game will be his 1,384th first-class match. He clearly enjoyed last week's match but, as Wilson said: "He will always be regarded as one of the great goalkeepers. He shouldn't have to think where his next meal is coming from."

No 197

Workington

FAN'S EYE VIEW

by David Goodall

There is something unique about the innocence of childhood and the naivete of early adolescence that provides you with a "taken for granted" view of the world. There were 92 teams in the Football League – and Workington were one of them.

It was special – it gave you a sense of identity when trying to explain where you came from. If you were into football, it was natural to assume that all other sane humans were as well, so you said: "I'm from Workington, you know. Division Three, but more usually 'Four'. My relationship with the Reds started sometime in the 1957-58 season when, as a nine-year-old, I became aware that adults kicked a ball seriously and that the ground was quite near to my home."

At that time I was neither aware of history, nor the scope of the game beyond my immediate reality. The cost of such immaturity meant that I missed the famous FA Cup third-round tie in January 1958 when "we" were knocked out by the "Bushy Babes" in one of the last games they played before Munich.

As the 60s and adolescence arrived, history and culture began to take a greater hold on our lives. Shankly had been our manager and we had missed it, but the stories sounded good when told by our elders. Then there had been Joe Harvey, who was allowed to leave to take over at Newcastle. We had drifted from the Third Division North to the Fourth Division,

and I had become aware of the process of re-election. In that time I saw the demise of Gateshead, Accrington Stanley, Bradford Park Avenue, and, nearer to home, Barrow. Life was now not so simple, innocent or straightforward.

In the summer of 1963 the club appointed a new player-manager, and there were a number of new signings. Little did we realise that Ken Furphy would produce a team that not only would give us promotion to the Third Division, but for a short time would threaten to top that league.

But this time there wasn't. We only applied for re-election seven times, there are 12 teams who matched that number or beat it, eight of whom are still in the "club". We went – and in came Wimbleton.

The trauma is still with us, even after 19 seasons. We missed the opportunities now offered by the GM Vauxhall Conference, plummeting to the lower levels of the Northern Premier League. A ground that once held 21,000 is now capped at 2,500, with the grandstand losing its roof as a consequence of Taylor. But they are still my team.

I now live in Liverpool and my nine-year-old son supports the local "Reds". However, he joins his dad to visit exotic places such as Warrington, Witton Albion, Curzon Ashton, Eastwood Town and other welcoming grounds. Several weeks ago we had a weekend in Workington. He did what I always wanted to do and was mascot for the home game with Worksop Town, watched by his grandad. Happy dreams...

promised a new opportunity, but the quality of the team appeared to get worse.

The last time that I saw them in that elite group of 92 was in the latter part of the 1976-77 season. I was in my Hertford period, so the nearest game was Cambridge. They went on to win the division that season, so we were just another home win for them, 4-1. A spirited performance from a team that was not good enough... but there was always next season!

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Furphy was attracted to Wimbleton, pre-Elton John, and took some of the stars with him. We returned to our roots in the Fourth Division. Left for higher education in 1968 to Manchester at its football best – but I was often to be found following my heart in places such as Stockport and Rochdale.

After graduation I found myself working in Oxford, so my relationship was maintained via the local weekly paper sent by my parents and carefully chosen visits home for holidays. The 1970s were bad times – each September

the move was long overdue. Shilton was almost 28, he had won 23 England caps – and a Second Division championship medal.

He had been relegated twice and only finished in the top eight once in a decade of regular first-team football.

In medal terms he was under-achieving. His best season had been with Stoke in 1975. Top in February, they finished fifth. Alan Hudson, the team's fulcrum, has since blamed Shilton's "posturing" for their decline.

It is hard to imagine an England No 1 now joining a club like Stoke were then. A modern equivalent might be Leicester – but then think of Ravanelli and Jannini at Middlesbrough. Money talks.

Arsenal, in the approach to the Double year, had been interested but were swayed by the form of Bob Wilson. Clough, when at Leeds, had wanted to buy Shilton but been sacked first. Manchester United, under Dave Sexton, had wanted to buy him but had been put off by his wages – and, maybe, by his rejection of Sir Matt Busby's offer of schoolboy terms at 14.

Forest seemed no bigger than Stoke when Shilton joined. They had just been promoted. They were instant champions – with Shilton as PFA Footballer of the Year – and followed up with successive European Cups.

The title was clinched by arguably Shilton's greatest save, from Mike

Platini had scored from a free-kick, and I think he blamed himself. The next day at the airport he was clearly not of this world. He was always a drinker, two to three days if he was badly upset by a defeat. He took it personally. But two days later he would be training until he dropped.

Shilton has since tramped the clubs, coaching here, acting as goalkeeping cover there. He did play twice, for Bolton, but, by a statistical quirk, only one game counts in the record books. The other was in the play-offs. If that had counted, the game with Fulham would have been his 1,000th.

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MAJOR WEEKEND FOOTBALL FIXTURES AND POOLS CHECK

TODAY	Second Division	GM Vauxhall Conference	Second Division
3.0 unless stated	1. Postponed: Blackpool v Middlesbrough	19. Bath v Stevenage	45. Clyde v Barwick
FA Carling Premiership	2. Chelsea v West Ham	20. Bradford v Preston	– Livingston v Queen of the South
Liverpool – 17 9 3 25 17 37	4. Leicester v Coventry	21. Bristol Rovers v Wycombe	46. Stenhousemuir v Bishop's
Aston Villa – 10 5 3 25 17 34	5. Manchester Utd v Sunderland	22. Bury v Stockport	– Telford
Wimbledon – 17 10 4 3 30 25	6. a Nottingham Forest v Arsenal	23. Chesterfield v Bournemouth	– Morecambe v Altrincham
Newcastle – 17 9 3 27 19 30	7. Southampton v Derby	24. Rotherham v Plymouth	– Rushden v Kidderminster
Aston Villa – 17 9 3 27 19 30	8. a Tottenham v Sheffield Wednesday	25. Westord v Gillingham	– Woking v Halifax
Bolton Utd – 17 7 7 3 22 25 25	9. a Crystal Palace v Charlton	26. Wrexham v Bristol City	
Everton – 17 6 7 3 22 25 25	10. Grimsby v Bradford City		
Leeds – 17 6 7 3 22 25 25	11. Huddersfield v QPR		
Sheffield Wed – 17 8 7 3 18 19 25	12. Ipswich v Stoke		
Sheffield Wed – 17 8 7 3 18 19 25	13. Oldham v Manchester City		
Sheffield Wed – 17 8 7 3 18 19 25	14. Port Vale v Norwich		
Sheffield Wed – 17 8 7 3 18 19 25	15. Reading v Portsmouth		
Sheffield Wed – 17 8 7 3 18 19 25	16. Sheffield Utd v Barnsley		
Sheffield Wed – 17 8 7 3 18 19 25	17. Tranmere v Wolves		
Sheffield Wed – 17 8 7 3 18 19 25	18. West Bromwich v Oxford Utd		
Nottingham Forest – 17 1 7 3 14 29 19			

TEAM SHEET

Chelsea v West Ham	Everton v Leeds	Leicester v Coventry	Manchester Utd v Sunderland
Last season: 1-2	Last season: 2-0	Last season: Did not play	Last season: Did not play
Last five League matches: Chelsea DDDLD, West Ham DDWD	Last five League matches: Everton LWWWW, Leeds LWWD	Last five League matches: Leicester LWWWW, Coventry DWWDD	Last five League matches: Manchester Utd WDDDD, Sunderland LDWWL
Petrescu, Hughes and Di Matteo all expected to return to			

Laws decree that strikers will return to haunt their old clubs and certain teams will come a cropper against their bogey team

While the laws of the game are subject to constant scrutiny and tinkering, football's unwritten laws tend to stand the test of time. Those laws, which you won't find in the most anarchic and long-winded Football Association rule books, decree, for example, that strikers always return to haunt their old clubs (witness Darren Huckerby and Stan Collymore against Newcastle and Forest); that certain strikers will always score against certain clubs (Alan Shearer's goal against Coventry was his 11th, the most damage he's inflicted on any one team), and that certain teams always come a cropper against the most feared opponents - their bogey team.

So West Ham really did not stand a chance at Edgeley Park on Wednesday night. It wasn't just the pouring rain, the long journey and Iain Dowie's errant sense of direction, nor the

knowledge that the last time the two clubs met in the Cup, in 1972, Coventry had won 2-1; but rather that Stockport have become something of a Coca-Cola bogey team for Premiership clubs. Having taken Everton to the wire last season, they beat Blackburn at Ewood Park (sealing Ray Harford's fate) before taking West Ham's scalp. "Brett is County's Angell - now he faces the Saints", the headlines noted. It will take a betting man to bank on Graeme Souness' side bringing Angell and his team-mates back down to earth.

Most teams, at one time or another, will admit to a bogey team. Since Stockport's - Aldershot Town - are in the First Division of the Icis Football League, the teams are unlikely to meet barring a Cup exploit of Stockport-like proportions. Up until the Shots dropped out of the Foot-

ball League in 1992, neither Stockport (nor Crewe for that matter) had ever managed to beat the Surrey side at the Recreation Ground. As for the Hammers, they may not be a bogey team in the true sense of the word, but they can claim to have put the wind up one of the biggest sails of them all. After the Hammers' obstinacy in the final game of 1994/95 against Manchester United had ensured the championship went to Ewood Park, there was a certain inevitability about the way fortune came out of its hiding place to give West Ham a 2-2 draw against United two seasons ago. Anywhere other than Upton Park would surely have witnessed a different script.

Arsenal fans will tell you that Luton are something of their bogey team, but Luton's local rivals, Watford, are arguably more so. Although

two divisions now separate them, of the 13 League and Cup games they played while Watford were in the top flight, Arsenal won just three. In the 1985/86 season the Hornets did the double over the Gunners on consecutive days then repeated the feat two seasons later despite getting relegated.

However, the game that most Watford fans remember is the stormy 1987 FA Cup quarter-final at Highbury when Arsenal claimed that remarks by the Watford manager, Graham Taylor, before the game had turned the referee in the Hornets' favour; a claim that gathered momentum when, in the last minute with Watford leading 2-1, every Gunner stopped to appeal for a penalty, the ref waved play on and Luther Blissett ran the length of the field to score. To rub salt into Arsenal's wound, Watford's opponents in the semi-finals were Spurs.

But Watford would not doubt one of those wins for one against their bogey team, Luton, who they have not beaten since 1986/87. Arsenal themselves have found Spurs something of a bogey team at Highbury in recent years; Gerry Francis was tempting fate in admitting before the November derby that he had never lost to Arsenal. The Gunners duly won 3-1, the first time they had won there since December 1991.

Six's real bogey team is Aston Villa, who they haven't beaten since September 1990, but it's Villa's Midlands rivalry with Coventry which boasts the longest running feud: Coventry's victory at Highfield Road in November 1988 ended a sequence of 26 games, 51 years and 17 managers without a Sky Blues win. These unwritten laws seldom have any foundation; they're simply quirks of fate which embroil the fabric of the game. But as psychologist George Sik believes it's all down to the locus of control. Elb? "Well, if players perceive their destiny to be out of their hands and down to Lady Luck, the manager, manipulative developers or even grey shirts, they'll start thinking 'We're fated not to beat them', and subconsciously stop trying." Sik says.

It's hard to imagine quite what external locus of control Hibs blamed over the 22 games, five years, seven months and 23 days they failed to beat Edinburgh rivals Hearts, but easier to imagine how the relief when they ended that run, on 27 August 1994, reduced skipper Gordon Hunter, a lifelong Hibs fan, to tears.

Incidentally, Sunderland's bogey team at Roker Park in the early 1990s was Southend. Frustrated at having lost four times in five meetings between 1991-94, the Rokerites took drastic action. In April 1995 they spent £600,000 in removing from Roots Hall the root cause of the trouble - the striker who had scored every time he played them. Unfortunately, said striker was soon on his way out of Roker having made just 10 appearances and failed to score. His name? Brett Angell.



OLIVIA BLAIR

Holiday presents risk and chance for United

Clive White on a potentially decisive weekend for Premiership contenders

fellow countryman Vieira) they can reasonably anticipate maximum points from the remainder of their games up to and including New Year's Day.

United's four fixtures till then look similarly favourable although they will have to get back to winning ways quite sharply after three draws in four games.

"Normally we have our dodgy spell over Christmas," Peter Schmeichel, their Danish international goalkeeper, said. "Last year we had a terrible Christmas but we still went on to win the Double. But we have had too many bad results this season to be able to afford a bad Christmas this time, so we have got to put things right and win the games over the festive season. I believe that if we manage to put a good run together like we have had every year

then we will go on and win again."

At the moment United are lagging nine points behind the leaders, Liverpool, who have played one more game. Last Christmas Eve they stood 10 points behind Newcastle United and we all know how that position turned out.

Last Christmas United got just what they wanted - a home win over Newcastle. This time Ferguson will be praying - perhaps for the only time in the last couple of seasons - that Kevin Keegan's troubled side pull off a win against Liverpool at St James' Park on Monday, a meeting which at Anfield last season precipitated the Geordies' downfall. With Aston Villa receiving their Coca-Cola Cup conquerors, the unbeatable Dons, tomorrow, the Saturday programme has been robbed of

four of the top five clubs. Villa look well-placed for a spot of revenge over Wimbledon, whose 19th match without defeat last week against Blackburn showed signs of fatigue.

That said, a fiercely demanding run of fixtures over the next couple of weeks could bring Villa's challenge to its knees, with Everton easily the best placed to claim their top-six position.

Avoiding defeat will again be the object of the exercise for Leeds at Goodison Park. The manner in which George Graham's side has chiselled 11 points out of the last 18 has made his old Arsenal look positively gung-ho by comparison. But should be deemed to bring the Ghanaian Tony Yeboah off the bench - the pair having settled their differences - for his first senior game in eight months, Yorkshiresmen may be reminded that it was not all drudgery under Howard Wilkinson.

United's record of nine consecutive titles set by Celtic under the late Jack Stein, are 12 points clear of Aberdeen at the top. But Smith only regards the advantage as five points - what their lead would be if Celtic were to win their three games in hand against Kilmarnock, Raith Rovers and Dunfermline.

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Shilton's milestone
Glenn Moore on the keeper's
1,000 game caper, page 22

Sport

Up for the Cup
David Llewellyn on the small
clubs' big day, page 20



Making a point: Stuart Pearce takes his first training session as Nottingham Forest manager
Photograph: Allsport

Pearce calls on a Clough for help at Forest

Stuart Pearce yesterday took over as caretaker manager of Nottingham Forest in succession to Frank Clark, who resigned on Thursday. His first move was to re-sign his former England colleague Nigel Clough on loan from Manchester City with a view to a permanent £700,000 transfer.

Pearce held a team meeting yesterday morning after training, at which he split out what he feels is required to halve a run of 16 matches without a win since the opening League match of the season.

Pearce said: "I've talked to the players and told them what I feel is needed from professional sportsmen. How they react I'll only find out on match days and on the training pitch."

"It is very important if I get the backing of the team. I think I'll

have the backing of the fans and the board of directors, but the players are the ones who've got to turn the situation around.

"I think they are a little nervous of me at present. They're a bit tentative in terms of what to say to me and what the situation is with me at present. But I am sure we will establish some middle ground between us."

Pearce is under no illusions as to the uphill nature of the task ahead: "It's the biggest challenge of my career, and when you are down the bottom of the table it has to be the toughest job. It would be nice to face the job with years of experience of what it entails, but that's not the case."

Pearce will review his position in mid-January, when he has had a chance to decide whether

he can combine managing with playing – and he is keen not to jeopardise his England prospects.

The Leicester manager and former Forest favourite Martin O'Neill has ruled himself out of contention should Pearce not take on the post permanently.

He said: "Let me say that people will have to put up with me at Leicester City for the next 18 months of my contract. I said the day I signed my contract at Leicester that I would not be walking out on the club before my contract runs out."

Clough has gone back to the

City Ground after being left out of City's line-up for the past month. He is not match-fit so is unlikely to come into contention to face Arsenal today.

Meanwhile, the consortium led by the local businessman Sandy Anderson, the recommended choice of the current

board of directors, is set to take over at Forest in the new year.

Anderson will now have a clear run in his battle to take charge after the rival consortium headed by Monte Carlo businessman Lawrie Lewis opted to pull out.

Australia's new national coach, Terry Venables, yesterday named a home-based squad for his first three matches in charge. The former England manager, who officially takes over when he arrives in Australia on 3 January, will use a four-nations series with games in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney from 18–26 January to assess locally-based players prior to the World Cup qualifiers.

The West Ham striker Ian Dowie is likely to be out of action since breaking both shins during a reserve game at Liverpool on 5 October.

West Brom flotation, page 16

was injured when he fell awkwardly in a challenge with Mikael Flynn.

The Football Association yesterday confirmed that the Liverpool defender Neil Ruddock has been charged with bringing the game into disrepute over his attack on the Tottenham chairman, Alan Sugar, in a Sunday newspaper article.

Ruddock is unlikely to receive any support from his club, who have already apologised to Sugar.

The Manchester United striker Andy Cole will make his comeback in Monday's reserve game against Derby at Bury. The £7m former Newcastle player has been out of action since breaking both shins during a reserve game at Liverpool on 5 October.

FIRST TEST: Vice-captain survives early scare to compile his third Test century of the year and put home side on the defensive

England given fresh hope by Hussain

DEREK PRINGLE
reports from Bulawayo
Zimbabwe 376;
England 306 for 4

It took the arrival of the Gully, a chill wind uncannily reminiscent of a May tail at Derby, as well as the more timely intervention of an unbroken century from Nasser Hussain, to convince England that their inexperienced opponents are not invincible when cool heads and straight bats are pitted against them. If more of the same sang-froid is applied until teatime today, England could well be in the unusual position of winning an overseas Test match, something they have not achieved since the Adelaide Test almost two years ago.

Fortunes can swiftly change when significant breaks begin to go your way. Hussain, whose third three-figure score for England took just over five hours, was let off first ball when short-leg split a sharp chance as he shaped to flick Strang to mid-wicket.

Momentarily shaken, it was a reprieve that brought the best from the Essex man, whose patient innings and unbroken stand of 126 with John Crawley, have resurrected England's prospects of a positive result – a situation not widely foreseen at the start of play where Ladbrokes' odds against an England win stood at 20-1.

A combative and emotional character, England's vice-captain was in no doubt as to what the milestone meant to him, and how it fitted in with England's plans for the remainder of this match.

"It's a huge moment in my life as any hundred for England is," he said after a cool, drily

day's play had finished in sunshine. "The slowness of the pitch and the way they just sat in the game and spread their fields out, meant you were never going to smash a hundred. You've got to grind it and that's what I did today."

"We've now got to try and bat for at least two sessions and get a lead. Then let's see what they are like batting under a bit of pressure for once."

It is a compelling thought and on yesterday's evidence alone, Zimbabwe's cricket still appears to be some way from being fully formed, with much of finishing touches being operated in a charmingly DIY manner.

For instance, instead of the revolving sight-screens that double as advertising boards on many established Test grounds around the world, the screens here at the Queen's club have fixed adverts behind the bowlers' arm which are then alternately revealed and covered up by a man drawing and opening a set of white curtains.

The bowling – when shorn of Paul Strang – is almost as quaint and lacks depth, being little better than an average county attack. True, the highly regarded Heath Streak is clearly short of fitness, and Eddo Branson's outswinger was badly missed, but on a sluggish pitch like this, only Strang's leg-spin looked capable of moving the game forward for Zimbabwe.

He is not quite ready to keep company with Warne or Mushtaq, but on a day when precious little pressure was exerted by his colleagues howling at the other end, he ran them a close third, taking 3 for 83, with 35 overs of first-class leg-spin.

Nick Knight despite his 56 appeared completely flummoxed by his googly, and Alec Stewart,

eventually sawn off by a poor umpiring decision, was never quite at ease with his bag of tricks.

With Graham Thorpe continuing his sketchy tour with a scrappy 13 before edging a perfectly pitched googly to slip, England found themselves at 180 for 4 but Hussain and Crawley then composed their telling reply.

As individuals, they are England's best players of spin, though for quite differing reasons. Hussain does not read the wrist-spun ball quite as easily as Crawley, whose rotary skills, as tested by the straitened timetable of Dr Ken West, an American eye specialist, have made him particularly fluent at reading a turning ball.

Hussain's strength lies not so much in vision, but in the ball-bearing flexibility of his wrists, whose ability to ride and compensate the vagaries in turn and bounce, make up for other shortcomings, such as an occasionally stiff front leg.

Having initially helped themselves to some particularly wayward seam bowling from Streak and Henry Olonga, both batsmen were later forced into playing watchful innings, as Alastair Campbell, Zimbabwe's captain, spread his fields and went on the defensive.

It was an obstacle not presented to the earlier batsman, who were fed a succession of "hit me" balls from the pace bowlers. Knight, in particular, was savage towards anything directed short and wide outside his off stump (of which there was plenty).

In a flurry of cuts and carves, he rapidly made his way to his half-century, before Olonga cleverly got a slower ball to swing late into the left-hander's pads. It was the faster bowlers' sole success on a day that England at last showed some class.



Four square: Nasser Hussain, the England vice-captain, dispatches a delivery from Henry Olonga to the boundary during his gritty century against Zimbabwe in Bulawayo yesterday

Photograph: Empics

Bulawayo scoreboard

Third day: Zimbabwe won toss	
ZIMBABWE – First innings 376 (A Power 112, A D R Campbell 24).	
ENGLAND – First innings 48 for 4	
Wicket: 11	
Umpires: G S Chanda, G Olonga (105 min, 79 wkt, 9 bound)	
1A: Stewart, 2a b P Strang (6)	
1B: Campbell, 2a b P Strang (6)	
1C: Campbell, 2a b P Strang (6)	
1D: Campbell, 2a b P Strang (6)	
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